

good manners

Commit to Customer Excellence

Christine Chen, contributing editor, *Recipes for Good Living Magazine*
www.gpprotocol.com



“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.” These words were written by Vince Lombardi. I love these words. I especially love the end, “. . . regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.”

Let me explain. I’m reading a book right now entitled *The Fred Factor* written by Mark Sanborn. Fred was Mr. Sanborn’s postman. Fred was not just an ordinary postman. He was an exceptional postman. A postman who chose to deliver the mail with excellence. You see, Fred was committed to doing his job in a way that put his customers first.

Sanborn shares his first experience with Fred. When he moved into the neighborhood where Fred delivered mail, Fred welcomed him to the neighborhood and introduced himself. He informed Mr. Sanborn that he was his postal carrier and would be taking care of his postal needs. In fact, after finding out that Mr. Sanborn travelled extensively, Fred even asked him for his travel schedule so that he could bundle his mail and have it ready upon his return. Even when Fred was off duty and driving through the neighborhood, he took time to stop and say hello to his postal customers.

Fred was building relationships. He didn't settle for mediocrity. John C. Maxwell once said, "You add value to people when you value them." No matter what your job may be - secretary, clerk, dentist, CEO, waitress, teacher, cleaner, speaker, postman - doing it with excellence and building relationships is not only the key to success, but the key to your own fulfillment and joy.

We've all experienced poor service. There's the grumpy receptionist. The disengaged doctor. The unhelpful service representative. The waiter who seems annoyed that you can't decide between the chocolate mousse pie or the carrot cake. You then ask which one he would suggest, and he says, "I don't eat desserts." Yes, this actually happened, and I'm sure I won't be going back to that restaurant again!

Delivering customer service with excellence is not very difficult and costs very little. Delivering an exceptional customer experience just takes a commitment to serve with joy. To serve with imagination. To serve knowing that all deserve respect. To serve with the idea that the customer is number one.

Last year Jim Cramer of Mad Money and Danny Meyer, a successful restaurant owner, created the Hospitality Index Report. They featured seventeen companies who have chosen to deliver exceptional customer service. Some of the companies they researched included Whole Foods, Amazon, Costco, Apple, Southwest, and Nordstrom. Now here's the amazing finding of their report. These world-class companies outperformed the S&P by four times even during the downswing in our economy. Why is that? These companies have demonstrated that when you put the

customer first, customers are more loyal, spend more, and refer more. Amazing stuff!

It's basically about building relationships. Customers are loyal to those who treat them well and create a positive experience. And, in light of today's declining customer service, unfortunately it doesn't take much effort to give a "WOW" experience.

Are you ready to go from mediocrity to excellence? Do you want to get up each morning excited about your work? Here's a list of some ideas to get you started:

- Think like the guest: I actually like referring to the customer as the guest. A guest is someone to be honored. Once you start viewing your customers as people to be honored, treating them with respect is easier. And, it's easier to think what will make them happier.
- Be a detective: If you work in an area where you know what guests will be coming to your office, find out a little about them. What kind of drink do they like? What are their reading preferences? Can you imagine your guest's reaction if you offered a favorite drink and magazine upon arrival?
- Keep a database: This is very simple but yet so powerful. For returning guests, keep a log of their preferences and personal information they have shared such as last vacation, kids' activities, personal achievements. And then, ask about their recent vacation or graduation when they come back.
- Know your guest's name: We all love to hear our own name. It makes us feel special, remembered, and appreciated. Know and use your guests' name upon arrival, throughout interaction, and upon departure.
- Be consistent: Deliver exceptional service every single time. There should be no surprises such as great service today and lousy service tomorrow. Create service standards to be followed by every single employee.

- Handle service failures effectively and immediately: We are all human. Mistakes happen. How you handle them will determine if your guest will come back. Here's the key - fix the problem beyond your guest's expectations. No excuses. No blame. Now you will not only have a loyal guest, but a brand ambassador.
- WOW the guest: Provide anticipatory service rather than reactionary service. Look for opportunities to surprise your guests by exceeding expectations.

Do you think Fred loved being a postman? You bet! Why? He woke up each morning with a commitment to value, honor, and respect his guests. And, guess what? When Fred got reassigned to a new postal territory, his guests put up such a fight that the postal office gave him back his old territory. Now that's loyal guests. What about you? Would your guests fight to get you back?

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