



## Management and Performance Associates - Newsletter – February 2014

### Etiquette and customer service in the age of mobile electronics

Two situations caught our attention recently: We were sitting at a coffee shop, and noticed a frantically gesticulating customer trying to get the barista's attention. This went on for a while, and as we were sitting near the barista, I tried to get his attention as well. It was impossible! His eyes were fixated on his iPhone. He was trying to advance to the next level of Candy Crush.

That afternoon, we went to a bank to exchange some funds to the local currency. The teller had earphones on! He was enjoying the downloaded music. He was singing out loud . . . way out loud. He was oblivious to those around him or he just didn't care. His level of service was mechanical, and there was neither eye contact nor acknowledgement that he was dealing with a customer.

At this point, some of you are probably saying "These kids need to get rid of their gadgets!" Our point of view is that's no longer realistic. Should we really expect these "kids" to disconnect from their social media, games and music? We don't think so, but at the same time, customers continue to have an expectation of good customer service, as they should. A much better question would be "How can we reconcile these two views?"

Managers are supposed to observe how their staff members are performing, and based upon observation, he or she is supposed to provide coaching and feedback. This is where things may get complicated. Here are some possible scenarios:

#### **Scenario number one: Managers are not observing staff members**

In many situations, managers are busy and involved with many tasks. They are not performing their most important role, which is managing their employees. In this scenario it is impossible for a manager to be aware of their staff's current performance unless a client makes a formal complaint. We would add that in this scenario neither management nor the staff member is focusing on the customer.

#### **Scenario number two: Managers are aware that employees are not engaged in full customer service, but do nothing**

The most important benefit of providing feedback to a staff member is to increase his/her level of awareness about a specific behavior. By abdicating from this basic responsibility managers are perpetuating the issue.

#### **Scenario number three: Managers are also connected to their cell phones**

How are you supposed to talk to your employees about this issue if you, as a manager, don't set a good example? Being a role model is one of the most powerful actions a manager can take to influence staff to incorporate desired behaviors. Culture is commonly defined as "the way we do things around here." It is most often learned from observing others.

#### **Scenario number four: Managers decide to coach employees on the wrong issue and say "Get rid of your phones!"**

There are several problems with this. First, don't confuse coaching with barking orders at your people. Second: the focus of your conversation should be on the competency



of customer service. The issue is not the electronic device, but the fact that employees in these scenarios are not focusing on their customers. In other words, they could get rid of their phones and still not provide service.

### **So, what is a manager supposed to do in these situations?**

Focus on the outcome, not the cell phone. With that mindset, engage the employee in a coaching conversation. Effective coaching conversations require maintaining a very challenging ratio of 80/20.

### **The 80 percent**

Eighty percent of the conversation should be about exploring the staff member's perspective, using receptive influencing behaviors such as asking open ended questions, demonstrating that you are listening and displaying empathy.

Powerful questions are related to exploring the staff member's perception of the situation, its causes, possible solutions and implementing a plan.

Examples of questions that could be used in these situations are:

- a) Imagine that roles were reversed. How does it feel to be ignored by the barista?
- b) What are some possible consequences if the customers constantly feel that they are not valued?
- c) What can you do differently in the future so that the customer has a valuable experience?
- d) What else?

### **The 20 percent**

Twenty percent of the conversation is reserved for you to provide feedback to your staff member, in case he/she is not aware of the situation. Please remember that providing feedback is to provide information, not to judge, provide advice, recommend or solve.

One example of feedback for the first situation is:

"The customer was waving at you for roughly two minutes. You didn't notice because you were concentrating on your game. Instead of paying his check, he walked out. Not only did we lose the money from him, but we also may have lost a customer – for good."

At the beginning of this article we mentioned that asking these "kids" to get rid of their phones was not realistic, and it should not be the point of your conversation. Anytime some staff member's behavior bothers you, keep asking yourself: "What is the exact behavior that bothers me and how exactly is it impacting performance?" The problem is not wearing ear buds. The real issue is ignoring customers. Chances are your staff member will understand and adjust his/her behavior if you focus your comments on the outcome and impact on the customer, not on a generational characteristic.

### **See you next time. We welcome your feedback.**

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