



We exist to serve others so they may better serve the world. SM

Written by: Bryan K. Williams

Customer Engagement: Where do we begin?

A few years ago, I wrote an article entitled, "The Greatest Bellman I ever Met". It was about a bellman that amazed me with his warmth, class, and professionalism. This bellman was not interested in just serving; he was committed to providing an engaging service experience. I could literally hear the emotion in his voice when he said "If there is anything further you need while at MY hotel, please let me know". After the article was published in Hotel-Online, I've been asked the same question repeatedly in my keynotes and workshops, "How do we create an army of employees like the bellman in that article?" The short answer is to hire employees who already enjoy serving others, then give them the ongoing support and recognition needed to perform at their best. The longer and more complete answer is to build a culture around customer engagement.

Your company's goal should be to create a service experience that fully satisfies every customer. In fact, you should be interested in not only satisfying your customers; but engaging them as well. Engagement involves a deeper level of service that turns mere visitors into loyal ambassadors.

Engagement involves a deeper level of service that turns mere visitors into loyal ambassadors.

So let's focus on some specific actions that can be done immediately to jumpstart this culture of engagement. First, the senior leaders in the company must be engaged before they can expect the workforce to be engaged. There's no way to sugarcoat it. Either the senior leaders are fully committed to creating an engaging culture, or they are not. Whatever the CEO and his/her team deem as top priorities, the rest of the organization will follow. Their commitment must be real and they must have zero tolerance for anything less than success. These leaders must be committed to holding everyone accountable, including themselves, and they must articulate why their vision for exceptional service is more enticing than the company's present reality. Once that foundation is effectively laid, here are some recommendations to assist with your efforts.

Recommendation #1 - Form an action committee that is focused on helping the organization move forward with its engagement efforts. The team should be a cross-section of employees that represent all parts of the organization. This committee should have its own mission statement that keeps everyone focused on their purpose and why their efforts are relevant. They should have the organization's full support and the senior leaders should expect regular progress reports on the team's efforts.

Recommendation #2 - Establish a budget and build awareness on what the organization will be doing and why they are doing it. Constantly communicate the "purpose" of your new engagement initiative, and why it is necessary. Use promotional materials such as banners, posters, intranet, emails, newsletters, and special stationary.

Recommendation #3 - Distinguish between good service, great service, and engaging service. It is important to make such distinctions so that the entire workforce can be clear on what engaging service really means. I've seen many managers declare to their employees, "Starting today, we are going to give better customer service". However, I am confident that each employee that hears such a declaration has a different idea of what "better customer service" really means. For instance, you and I may have different ideas on what a "clean room" looks like. The same is true for service. To align everyone's efforts, there must be clarity around what engaging service looks like, sounds like, and feels like. The best people to explain engaging service are those who are being served. There's nothing more powerful than your customers explaining in vivid detail how to engage them. You can see an example of this on www.engagemenow.com. On the site, you will be able to view a short video called "EngageMe...the voice of your customer". It depicts engagement from the customer's perspective. Include it in your new employee orientation, show it in your training classes, and view it during town hall meetings. The point here is to build awareness and stimulate dialogue around how the customer expects to be treated.

Distinguish between good service, great service, and engaging service.

Recommendation #4 - Take the following seven principles and focus on one principle per week for the next seven weeks. After the initial seven weeks are done, revert back to principle #1 and keep the cycle going. Also consider reviewing each principle during the first week of October, which is National Customer Service Week.

Here are the Seven Principles of EngageMe:

- Principle #1: Create an inclusive atmosphere
- Principle #2: Be eager to serve
- Principle #3: Be welcoming
- Principle #4: Offer a gracious goodbye
- Principle #5: Turn customers into ambassadors
- Principle #6: Create a total experience
- Principle #7: Earn your customers' confidence...reap the rewards

There are worksheets on the following website that can assist with your ongoing discussions on engagement: <http://bwenterprise.net/EngageMe.html> . I encourage you to add activities and other creative ideas to keep the topic of customer engagement fresh on everyone's mind.

Developing a service culture is not an overnight process. It requires ongoing efforts to condition the entire workforce into service professionals. The staff must be consistently engaged in order for their customers to be consistently engaged. Creating a culture of engagement begins with you and what you commit to doing right now.

--August 21, 2007

Find more articles relating to service excellence at www.bwenterprise.net. Also on the website, you can subscribe to the official B.Williams Enterprise emailing list. You will receive announcements, newsletters and other excellent resources.

-We exist to serve others so they may better serve the worldSM.-