

Customer Service or Customer Focus

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These words are often over used and under utilized. A great question to ask ourselves is: are we customer focused or are we focused on good customer service. When we focus on good customer service, we hire the people who relate well to others. They get good scores on customer surveys and we think we just need to hire more of them. I call this the transaction approach – we are good in the moment. And we stop there!

To be customer focused, we put the customer into the center of all our planning, our processes, our systems. We ask questions like: what do our customers need? What would make this a memorable experience for them? How can we improve our systems to best meet the customers' needs? How do our decisions affect our customer? The customer is at the core of all our thinking and planning, not just when we are face to face with them.

Disney World does this well. They hire good people and empower them with the skills, knowledge and resources to their job. Their employees are called cast members and are given specific jobs and clear rules about their jobs and expected to be customer focused always. An example of this is the story of a cast member who was working a merchandise cart. A park guest came up to them saying that he was feeling faint and needed some water. The cart didn't have water. What would most people do? Probably leave their cart and take the guest to get some water. But this violated a rule of never leave your station. So what did the cast member do? He pointed the man to a cart where there was water and asked to walk over there (a very short distance). While the man was walking there, the cast member called the cart's owner and told him the situation, so that as the man approached, the cast member was holding out a bottle of water to him. That's being customer focused. The cast member was equipped with the resources and skills to act in the best interest of the customer. And granted this is not an example of a man who was in danger of passing out in route to the next cart. My guess is Disney started stocking water at all carts in the future as a result of this experience.

Another great example of Disney's customer focus is the review they do of park on a regular basis. They watched to see how often guest dropped trash on the ground and placed trashcans 25 paces apart. That's a lot of trash cans. And you rarely if ever see trash on the streets of Disney. They created passes for high volume rides, so guests could get a ticket for a rider later in day without having such a long wait. The parking lot is organized so that retrieving your car is easy and clear.

That's being customer focused. You don't have the luxury of working in such an extreme customer experience, so how can you apply the ideas here? Hold a meeting with your team to look at your processes from a customer's perspective. Ask yourself or your team: What do our customers need from us?
Ask yourself: on a daily basis how do I create and convey a customer focus mindset.

I think of it as alignment. If my processes, structures, and messages are all built from a customer focus my work is in alignment and I will be a successful leader. Strengthen your leadership from instituting a customer focus.