

Red Carpet Service: What's Your Buzz?

By Donna Cutting

When was the last time you were given the red carpet treatment?

Can't remember?

And yet, the phrase "red carpet customer service" is being thrown around as if it were an every day experience. Perhaps it is, in Hollywood. However, the rest of us have gotten used to mediocre service at best.

What about your company? Can you, without hesitation, honestly state that your customers consistently receive the very best in customer service from those who work for you? Are your employees brimming with excitement and pride over the way they take care of your customers?

If your company is like most then, quite frankly, probably not! Nine out of ten people say it should be easy to provide customer service, yet literally half the time they do not have a positive experience, according to a recent survey by Creative Strategies and Connell Associates. In the same study four out of five people said they stopped doing business with a company because of bad customer service.

Some smart organizational leaders are beginning to realize that by going the extra mile they create a positive buzz that keeps their customers coming back for more and bringing friends! These leaders in the customer experience understand that by committing to extraordinary "red carpet" service, they are laying the foundation for extraordinary bottom line results.

Consider the following examples of organizations that deliver superstar service, as profiled in *The Celebrity Experience: Insider Secrets to Delivering Red Carpet Customer Service*.

Once committing to delivering exceptional service:

The Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center increased their revenues by 14.4% in just one year's time.

The American Payroll Association went from an organization in financial crisis

operating out of a rented office to one that tripled its membership to 23,000 and invested in its own administrative building and several state-of-the-art-training facilities.

High Point University increased their campus visits by 70% and enrollment by 63% in three years time.

So, what do the leaders of these organizations know about red carpet service that most leaders don't? Here are five common denominators that bridge the gap between ho-hum customer experience and WOW!

MISSION AND VALUES MATTER. In organizations with a reputation for being extraordinary, the mission and value statements are more than just platitudes for the website and wall posters. They are the guiding principles behind every action - and each team member knows clearly and tangibly how they express their mission within the context of their job.

Stop an employee at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Conventions Center and they will tell you exactly what their service basics are and how they individually put those into action.

Make your value statement a living, breathing document and you'll be on your way to red carpet service.

ONLY THE BEST. Red carpet experience providers know that their service is only as good as their least engaged employee. They hire for fit...and if someone doesn't fit within their culture, they don't stay. It's as simple as that. When it is a fit, however, watch out! Their pride and energy is clear. Visit High Point University and employees will enthusiastically tell you about the many service (and educational) strategies they've put into place that has made them a stand-out institution.

It is said that the quality of a play cannot surpass the quality of the cast! When your "cast members" are excited about your culture and your service there is nothing they can't accomplish.

TRAINING IS PARAMOUNT. To give exceptional service, leaders in these organizations know that continuous training is the key. Dan Maddux, Executive Director of the American Payroll Association, credits excellent training of his

team as part of the exponential growth of his organization. He doesn't just train in service, but sends his employees to seminars on any subject he thinks will help them do their job better. That might include presentation skills, dressing for success, and even how to hail a cab in New York City.

Are you investing in your people so they can best live up to your standards of customer service excellence?

A COMMITMENT TO WOW!! Good customer service isn't enough for these organizations. They want to WOW you! Visit High Point University and your parking spot will be reserved by name, your tour - given via golf cart - will include no more than 2 families, and you just might meet University President Nido Qubein. When your child moves into the dorm during his or her freshman year, you can stay in the car. A group of upperclassman and faculty will be on hand to unload the trunk and help with the move. If that weren't enough - you can relax at home too. There is valet parking after hours so your child does not have to walk alone across the campus at night. WOW!!

Strive to surprise your customers in unforgettable ways that will have them buzzing about their star treatment!

THEIR PEOPLE ARE FIRST. When Arthur Keith became General Manager of the Gaylord Opryland he made his STARS (Gaylord employees) number one. That has made all the difference as evidenced by their continually rising customer satisfaction scores. They are at 80% or more occupancy at all times - a statistic almost unheard of in the hotel industry. They also put their money where their mouth is. Every employee has an opportunity to receive a \$200.00 bonus quarterly. Fifty dollars for reaching financial goals, and up to One Hundred Fifty for meeting customer service goals. Now that's a commitment to extraordinary service.

Red carpet service providers are consistent in living their values, hiring carefully, training impeccably, committing to the WOW and putting their people first. Develop these habits in your leadership team and you'll be giving celebrity service and reaping superstar results.

Donna Cutting, CSP, is a customer service expert, dynamic keynote speaker, and author of two books including *501 Ways to Roll Out the Red Carpet for Your Customers: Easy-to-Implement Ideas to Inspire Loyalty, Get New Customers, and Leave a Lasting Impression*. She's the Founder and CEO of Red Carpet Learning Systems, Inc, leading a

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