

CHARISMATIC CUSTOMER SERVICE

Shoppers now expect more than satisfaction.
They want an experience, and it is your job to create just that.

People look at the workers moving around the lawn and garden center, hefting bailed trees and pushing carts with potted flowers. But when it comes to the lawn and garden center, the physical work is just one part of the job. The interaction with customers is growing in importance.

Walt Disney knew this. He observed that when people left Disneyland, what they would remember were his employees, err ... cast members, and how they – the guests – were treated. Your lawn and garden business will have to compete with Disney, Apple, Trader Joe's and a host of other retail stores in the future, so it's important to take note.

Customer service as a practice has been a major business focus for the last 30 years, but it is quickly giving way to the trend of creating customer experiences. Your employees are part of these experiences.

How do you create a customer experience?

Being Present Instead of Presenting

When employees are learning a new job, they tend to focus on product information, internal logistical issues or observing how policy is lived by everyone in the organization. When they have a command of the job, then they can move from presenting to being present for the customers.

Think of the times when someone is listening to you, but his or her mind was elsewhere. People nod their heads, but behind their eyes is a vacancy as the listener is wondering if they have enough milk at home for the kids. They are not present.

Disney again is a great example of this. Besides their normal training for new employees, Disney knows certain jobs require additional training. The street sweepers not only keep the park clean, but also Disney knows they will get more questions than almost any other employee. "Excuse me, could you tell me where the nearest bathroom is?" "Pardon me, could you take a picture of our family in front of Cinderella's castle?"

Street sweepers are given additional training so they can be comfortable with their whole job – a broom and a dustpan are just part of that.

If your customer is taking smartphone pictures of

shrubs, is your employee present enough to suggest to them a better picture with another plant just out of sight?

Asking the Right Questions

Customers now value your questions more than they do your answers.

What a plant costs or where to find the grass seed are answers. But real connection with customers requires the experience of working with questions.

A few years ago I met a man named Monte at a local lawn and garden store. I explained that we had a brand new home that needed landscaping and that I wanted to do the work myself (some guys just need to learn how to run a Bobcat ... it is a bucket list thing.)

Instead of walking me through his greenhouse pointing out various plants for our consideration, I made my way to a table where he took out a notebook. The questions quickly let us know that we had found a trusted advisor.

"How long do you plan on being in the home?" "Will you do your own yard work or hire that out?" "Will you have a sprinkling system?" "Do you have problems with deer?" Monte asked us questions we had not thought about.

Today customers want trusted advisors who will address the individual and specific needs they have. What do you call a prescription without a diagnosis? Malpractice.

There are different types of questions that doctors, lawyers and even trusted lawn and garden people ask. Are your employees confident enough to drill down into the customers' needs?

The Imperative to Listen

The average person speaks at approximately 250 words per minute. But we think at over 2,000 words per minute. The customer is talking and you are thinking about other things. They can tell.

Listening will become more essential for employees as customer experiences become more expected.

People who are listening do things physically to show they are paying attention. Their head moves. They lean in, with perhaps a lifted chin ... or the head is turned slightly as if to

Kordell Norton vacationed to Disney and was energized by the staff's multiple points of contact before his family even walked through the door. Hear Norton talk about this key to repeat sales at www.lgrmag.com/videos.

communicate, "I want my good ear to hear what you are really saying."

Another subconscious thing people do when they are listening is they raise the inside of their eyebrows. This usually opens the eyes wider and causes wrinkles on the forehead to appear. Yes, we know that you are now thinking about this and probably raising your own eyebrows.

What do we call someone who listens to what we really say? These people are assigned a term of being charismatic. Customer experiences will eventually all need to be charismatic.

Creating the Parts of an Experience

Experiences come in different shapes and colors. Life-changing experiences can quickly assemble into a list.

- Marriage
- Divorce
- Children/Birth of a Child
- Graduation
- Religious Conversion
- Stage Play
- Professional Sporting Event
- Vacation
- Getting hired
- Getting fired
- Death

How can you take the elements of these life-changing experiences and incorporate them into your lawn and garden business?

Here are some of the more common experience elements using an acrostic of DRASTIC.

Dollars

Great experiences have dollars involved. Do you spend money on a wedding or getting someone through college? Are there dollars involved with

MANAGEMENT

the birth of a child? Certainly, there are dollars involved when someone enters your lawn and garden business.

Raiment

Raiment is an Old Testament word for clothing. In most businesses the idea of a uniform is

standard. There is the experience of doctors and their white smocks. Wedding dresses, graduation gowns and Sunday attire are all part of the clothing worn in association with experiences.

Do you and your employees have a uniform ... something that sets you apart?

Authority

"By the power vested in me by the great state of 'x' I now pronounce you husband and wife." Great experiences have an authority figure with whom we give great power.

Do you endow your employees with power and respect? Apple has its geniuses and Trader Joe's has its crew members. Who do you have?



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