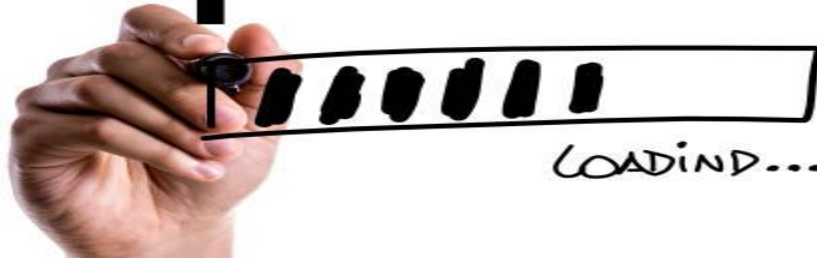


Service Quality

expectations



When a potential customer walks into a place of business, the individual usually expects that he /she can benefit from a pleasant experience. From simply observing the body language of an individual member of staff, one may detect whether the staff member is eager to serve, or on the other hand, simply couldn't care less as to why you are there. Where the members of staff have been trained, chances are that their response will be virtually a trademarked one.

There are several reasons why members of staff might be challenged to offer the best anticipated quality service. However, it is to credit of members of staff if they behave in a professional manner, despite whatever trying circumstances that may be prevailing within the organization. The members ought to be complimented not only on their professionalism, but also on their maturity. Their response is obviously based on the consideration given to the external customer, whom it is felt should not suffer the indignity of being subjected to poor service, as a consequence of internal wrangling or divisions. This response is a recognition that each customer's business is important, as it is through this patronage that the staff remains employed.

The display of poor attitudes, disinterest in the customer needs, to be followed by some rude and indifferent behaviour, all form part of a scenario which plays itself out in many business places on a daily basis. It is to be regretted that some employees don't attempt to hide their feeling and /or dispositions. The attitude displayed can be so disgusting, that it is likely to draw a sharp response from the customer(s). This is where it all goes downhill. Not only is the confrontation between customer and employee unsightly, but it can heightened existing workplace tensions; particularly where there is already a fractured management and employee relationship.

Irrespective of the prevailing workplace climate, management has a responsibility to ensure that the customer receives good service. Staff members should not fail to act appropriately. On paper, this seems to be an easy task. The fact remains that the way to improve the delivery of quality customer service, is through the training of employees. Management cannot absolve itself from any blame as far as the training of staff is concern. The fact that many employers are preoccupied with recruitment, but pay little or no attention to job orientation and training, makes this a significant issue in itself. If this problem is not carefully assessed and managed, it can contribute to the demise of a business.

Whenever there are smiling and pleasant faces to welcome prospective customers, this translates into a positive feeling. The reverse occurs, when there are no smiles, or any form of greeting, and worse yet, when it appears to the customer that he/she has to seemingly beg for assistance. The greeting of a customer and the offering of assistance shouldn't be mistaken or thought of as hustling. Hustling in itself borders on harassment, as it is more a case of the customer being placed under pressure. A customer is more likely to complain about being hustled or harassed, than of being warmly welcomed and offered good service.

The adage that the 'customer is always right' can be a thorny issue for those who take this literally. There is no way an unreasonable, insensitive, unruly, indifferent or aggressive customer can be right. A problem is created when an employee compromises him /herself, and behaves in much the same way as the offender. Management can become its worst enemy when it attempts to penalize the employee without investigating the matter. There is nothing wrong with management having a no tolerance policy on some forms of behaviour or actions taken by any of its employees. However, good sense should always prevail before executing a judgment, so that careful consideration is given to the circumstance(s) which led to the matter.

The delivery of quality service is something that shouldn't be taken for granted. It must be built on a set of standards and the observance of best practice. Those who choose to ignore it will find that within a competitive market, their business enterprise could find itself either lagging behind, slowing losing business and eventually being driven out of business.

