

The Guest

R E P O R T

Service excellence

Delivery dilemmas and delights define service

BY ROBERTA NEDRY

Service is only expensive when not received.

Think about all the steps involved in procuring a service before we finally get what we want. We look through catalogs, we make phone calls, we visit showrooms and Web sites, we receive marketing materials and have extensive conversations with sales representatives. Product experts fill us in on all the bells and whistles. The entire chain of service personnel builds our anticipation and our enthusiasm to justify the financial commitment and the choice we are about to make. The cash register rings, the credit card goes through, the deposit or reservation are made ... and then we wait.

We wait for the fulfillment of the promise made to us at the time of sale.

In most cases, this is when the "delivery" team takes over. The actual delivery of goods or services can also be the time when the process of sales and service comes to a screeching halt. This is also when future profits and sales can be diminished, if the transaction is not handled with care and focused attention.

When we don't get what we want during the time promised or even on time, when the order is different than what we purchased, when products arrive damaged or messy, or when nothing happens at all, how are service providers handling these "promise upsets?" How well is the delivery team trained to understand the impact of their role as the final service impression and to prevent promise upsets before they happen? Do they recognize that their actions may be responsible for the gain or loss of existing and future business? Are today's hospitality and business leaders paying enough attention to the delivery team and process? After all, service must be received positively on the receiving end to really be "of service." The ultimate fulfillment of any service commitment, and especially the opportunity for service excellence, takes place when the delivery point of contact is made – and is made very well.

Consider placing greater emphasis on the skills, importance and attitude necessary for ultimate delivery and in turn, ultimate service at this final impression point. Delivery impression points could include truck drivers, housekeepers, newspaper deliveries and subscriptions, wait staff, service technicians, tradesmen, tour guides, valet and parking services, room service and even repairmen.

The following tips and ideas may prove useful in preventing delivery dilemmas and enhancing delivery delights:

- Define service standards and specific actions for each point of contact within the delivery phase. Examples might be defining each step of the delivery moment; how it should be handled to make the best impressions; starting with a customer greeting; a clear confirmation of the order or service; and the resulting delivery. Most important will be the last thing they say and do. Sincerely thanking them for the business should be an absolute must.
- Instill the importance of attitude, eye contact and a smile in making the first impression of delivery. Just showing up and doing the job doesn't cut it.
- Make sure delivery personnel are sensitive and prepared for unhappy customers or

guests and equip them with skills to deal with late deliveries, wrong orders, damaged goods and unfulfilled promises. A little empathy, an apology and a proactive course of action go a long way and might encourage customers to keep doing business in spite of the mistakes.

- Recognize and consider compensating delivery personnel who do positively impact service and create the opportunity for future sales. Base this recognition on tangible results such as on-time deliveries, accuracy and cleanliness, preparation (as with directions to get there), and positive customer feedback.

- Train delivery personnel on how to observe or gather feedback from customers or guests on the spot. Ask customers a few key questions: "Is everything OK?" "Is your order what you expected?" "Is there anything else our company can do for you?" Provide an easy way to channel that feedback back to company sales and marketing personnel. Chances are, new ways to improve service or generate new business are the unopened boxes of opportunity in the delivery truck. Your delivery teams will jump at an incentivized way to contribute to the process and to the bottom line.

- Make sure delivery personnel know exactly what was sold and what the customer is expecting. They should have a proactive and committed role in ensuring customer and guest satisfaction. Service excellence happens when everyone cares and knows about the business at hand – and shows it.

Build relationships internally between delivery personnel and other members of the service chain of events. Lots of energy and dollars go into getting the sale. Make sure the baton of service gets passed to the delivery team and that they know how critical their role is in the process.

- When it's time to leave and the delivery deed is done, remember the importance of a "thank you" and that final moment to make sure the customer is happy. If they are not, make sure that customer knows how their problem will be resolved. Empower delivery personnel to make a call or report a problem immediately and give them the tools to reinforce any customer relationship. Even if the delivery service is contracted, they will still represent the final impression of your company or organization.

Not receiving service via the final delivery can be emotionally expensive for your customers, and financially painful for your business.

You get only one chance to make a first impression – and you get a powerful chance to anchor future impressions with the last one.



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