

# Why Worry About Service Improvement?

By Kifle Yirga

Many people complain about poor level of service available both in private and government organizations. A lot of valuable time is wasted because of inefficient service that consumes their valuable time. Majority of them wouldn't have visited those places had they had alternatives. Some say the poor service level prevails because there is no competitive environment. Leave alone the government organizations, private companies also fail to give due attention to the contribution of quality service to their profitability. Managers fail to recognize the importance of quality service in their leadership. They appear not to understand that quality service attracts customers.

The writer of this article highly appreciates the Chinese consciousness about quality service. Wherever you go in China, you would observe the attention given to customer service. Although Westerners criticize their economic system, they get amazed in the level of efficiency the Chinese show while delivering service. They thoroughly understood that the quality of service is the key to higher customer satisfaction.

In our country though, people working in service delivery do not care about customer satisfaction. In most places leave alone getting good service, they would mistreat you. Businesses, private or state, that have controlling role on the market for their products/services have a tendency to regard customers as captive markets that should gratefully accept the products/services made available to them. They consider them having no alternative option. There are business persons who fail to treat customers/clients properly because they do not know better.

There are serious cases where indifference and sometimes abuse with which customers are treated.

In government offices workers do not consider clients seriously. They do not bother to give any attention to lined up clients who are there to pay taxes, through those workers are paid their income. It is the same also in utility centers where people spend too much time to pay their bills. When you ask for information, you get answers in unintelligible grunts, in incomplete sentences, or rude explanations. Sometimes you are totally ignored. If you ask again you are regarded as a nuisance. Some cashiers make you feel they are doing you a favor when they collect money from you in settlement of your utility bills.

Such problems are wide spread. From time to time many people have given their views and complained in the media but we do not see any improvement.

Why do cashiers, clerks, sales staff, etc. behave the way they do? Could it be that they are taking out on the customer their own frustrations and dissatisfactions with their employers? Why do their supervisors and managers fail to notice what is going on right under their noses and not take action to remedy the situation? Why are not managers and supervisors approachable and accessible to clients that seek their interventions or greater responsiveness? Do they feel the situation is beyond remedy? Or do the managers themselves lack what it takes to manage?

In developed economies managers instill values in their staff starting from the bottom all the way to the top that a company exists only because customers exist. That way, workers have the duty to respect customers as their benefits come from the contributions from customers. Treating customers with the respect they deserve results in repeat purchase enduring loyalty and in passing the word around to friends and relatives of how well they were treated by the salespersons in a given shop, café or office. No advertisement is more effective than a satisfied customer spreading the word around freely to all those

who care to listen. Service providers should ask themselves how they would like to be treated if roles are reversed.

Businesses with HRD departments should emphasize the need for service quality to their staff. All managers and owners of big or small businesses should be aware of customer-orientation. They should adopt “the customer first mind set”. Customer relations should be made a crucial determinant factor in employees’ advancement, and those with poor customer service skills should clearly understand the enormity of what is at stake. They should understand that service failure results in attrition of customers; dissatisfied customers tell others their negative experience with their company. They must appreciate the fact that “who cares most wins more customers”.

Make customer service the most important thing in your work. Be pro-active not reactive to customer service issues as service quality is potential weapon to win competition. It is true that good customer service does not happen overnight – it requires team work, knowledge, system and motivation. But one has to work hard to improve service quality. It shouldn’t be underestimated. Customers get satisfaction not in what you do but the way you do it. Start your day with a mind- set that says: “No matter what, I will respect the customer.”

Employees who are assigned to give service should have personal and professional qualities, knowledge about the service and knowledge about the product. Team work is essential for improved customer service, meet regularly and evaluate previous performance. Exceptional service does not come from policy manuals, but from people who care. Interest and motivation to serve customers comes from your heart. Full knowledge about the service is very essential. It ensures better service. It makes the service a pleasant task. It develops self confidence. Service level is indicative of the knowledge and skill of the employees who directly contact the customer. Employees play vital role in creating customer satisfaction because they are service givers, the customer sees them as authorities and they are marketers by making first contact with the customer. Employees should have determination in their work. Determination is the will to go ahead and succeed.

Satisfied customers make continued transactions. Existing customers are inexpensive than generating new customers. Satisfied customers are willing to pay extra charges as they are less sensitive to small increments than new customers. Satisfied customers are more likely to recommend your service to others without charging you a coin. It is too expensive to replace lost customers even if it were possible. It costs substantially more to win a new customer than it does to keep current ones. As customers become more loyal, they can become advocates for your business, encouraging friends and acquaintances to work with you

Deploy hardworking, energetic, enthusiastic workers who can be easily motivated to serve customers. While assigning workers to a service center, choose the best workers who take pride in serving others enthusiastically.

The following additional points are helpful inputs to improve your service delivery:

#### 1. What Workers should do to Satisfy Your Customers

- Keep good personality at all times while at work
- Give prompt attention to the customer coming to get your help. Time is the scarcest commodity.
- Always consider the saying that “A customer is always right whatsoever the case may be!”
- Treat your customers as you would like to be treated by others

- Be aware that your competitors attract customers by giving better service
- Talk politely to a customer, whatever type that customer is
- Always show a smile while dealing with a customer
- Spell out a customer's name as correctly as it appears on his/her identification paper
- Show courtesy, manners and politeness because they are essential tools to build trust, respect and loyalty
- Let them be friendly and enthusiastic because people prefer to deal with a friendly and enthusiastic trainee than an indifferent expert
- Let them give the customer full and undivided attention
- Let them make every customer feel like your most special customer
- Let them avoid personal calls when dealing with a customer.
- Let them avoid chatting with coworkers in the presence of a customer
- Let them avoid eating or drinking while they have a customer to attend
- Let them be aware that every job is an important job.
- Let them provide the customer with opportunity to complain

## 2. Factors that Influence Quality of Service

- The physical evidence of the type of service provided
- The process used to deliver the service
- The price or various charges customers are expected to pay
- The suitability of the place
- The level of promotion or advertisement
- The type of people assigned to deliver the service; their appearance, dressing, attitude and behavior.
- The knowledge and skill of the employees who directly contact the customer
- Speed is essential for competitive advantage as fast action secures trust and fast service adds value
- "If a customer does not show you a smile, give him/her one of yours"
- It is employees that influence the service quality and satisfaction of the customer

## 3. Advantages of Retaining Customers

- A study in financial industry shows that a 5% increase in customer retention increases profits by 50%
- Satisfied customers make continued transactions
- Existing customers are inexpensive than generating new customers
- Satisfied customers are willing to pay extra charges as they are less sensitive to small increments than new customers
- Satisfied customers are more likely to recommend your service to others without charging you a coin
- A company's greatest asset is the number of satisfied customers it has
- It is too expensive to replace lost customers even if it were possible
- It costs substantially more to win a new customer than it does to keep a current customer
- The longer a company keeps a customer, the more profitable that customer is for the company

- As customers become more loyal, they can become advocates for the business, encouraging friends and acquaintances to work with you

#### 4. Why customers leave your organization and go elsewhere

- Studies show that about 68% of our customers leave us because of indifferent employees
- Only 4% of dissatisfied customers tell you the reason why they are unhappy with you, 96% of them tell to others
- If they find your service to be weak or if you appear to be below their expectation
- If you are incompetent
- If you ignore them when they come for your assistance
- If you fail to be available for them when they come for your service
- If you are rude to them
- If you lie to them or if you fail to deliver
- If you treat them as if they were wrong

#### 5. Complaint Handling Procedure

Handling customer's complaints is an important component of providing superior customer service. Put yourself in the customer's shoes and listen, identify the problem, avoid blaming the customer and resolve the problem. Complaints must be dealt with sympathetically, calmly and promptly.

- Listen completely, never interrupt
- Ask the key question "what else"
- Never disagree/argue, be diplomatic
- Apologize
- Resolve the complaint in win-win approach
- Thank the customer for bringing the complaint to your attention
- Take action (report to the concerned authority)
- A customer is not someone to argue with. Nobody won an argument with a customer

Poor service affects our profitability or achievement. Customers/clients waste their valuable time because of unnecessary bureaucracy. Managers and workers do not give due consideration to the importance of efficient service. Companies lose valuable customers because of poor level of service. All of these wrong views have damaging effect in our operation. So it appears that we should rightly worry about our service delivery.