The Customer Service Revolution

Overthrow Conventional Business, Inspire Employees, and Change the World
by John R. DiJulius III

Exceed Expectations
Give Them What They Can’t Live Without

QUICK OVERVIEW

Today’s crowded marketplace goes beyond competitive. It’s brutal. Or at least it can be for entrepreneurs and businesses that offer subpar or even average customer service. John DiJulius explains in The Customer Service Revolution that lackluster experiences simply don’t inspire loyalty or brand evangelism.

DiJulius’s insightful book challenges business leaders to take full responsibility for creating a positive customer experience from the first point of contact. He shares examples of negative cues—things that you may be doing to (unintentionally) offend customers—and shares solid ideas for helping your staff empathize with clientele with whom they may have little in common. Numerous examples of both stellar and appalling customer service help readers see how DiJulius’s principles could be put into practice in their own businesses to win customers’ hearts—for life.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

Most people know what they don’t want and are clear about things they dislike. But ask what they want, and very often the answer is vague and not much different than what they currently have. Which is why, as John DiJulius writes in The Customer Service Revolution, “You can’t ask the Customer what they want; you have to give them what they can’t live without.”

That’s exactly what top brands around the world do to excel at customer service. Starbucks didn’t ask people if they wanted a coffee-drinking experience; they simply provided one and let people fall in love with it. Apple combined best practices from customer service leaders and created unique stores that reportedly earn revenues of more than $4,000 per square foot.

The question you must answer is: What can you do to not just stay on par with the competition or even exceed customer expectations, but deliver service that wows people and keeps them coming back for more?

SUCCESS Points

A few things you’ll learn from this book:

• Why policies should be guidelines, not rules
• How and why you should strive to understand your customer’s perspective
• Why your customers will never be happier than your employees
• How you may be putting off potential customers
• What customers are really willing to pay
From 2008 to 2010, the United States experienced some of the worst economic times in our lives. The housing bubble burst and the stock market plummeted. We saw the demise of financial institutions. Foreclosures, job loss, and bankruptcy were rampant. What became known as the Great Recession ultimately affected the entire world economy. While much of it was devastating, some good came out of these troubling economic times. Believe it or not, there were many companies that survived significantly better than their competition and businesses in general, and as a result, they emerged better and stronger than before. How? Because in any economy—especially a down economy—Customer loyalty is your strongest asset! It took the recession to shine a spotlight on these thriving companies and what they had in common: a fanatical obsession on the Customer experience.

Customer service became hip, and more and more smart leaders and management teams started focusing on improving the experiences their companies delivered. As a result, over the past several years, overall Customer service satisfaction has improved. A revolution has started, a Customer service revolution, and it has gained incredible momentum.

**A CUSTOMER SERVICE REVOLUTION IS...**

A radical overthrow of conventional business mentality designed to transform what employees and Customers experience. This shift produces a culture that permeates into people’s personal lives, at home, and in the community, which in turn provides the business with higher sales, morale, and brand loyalty—making price irrelevant.

Let’s break that definition down to its core:

“A radical overthrow of conventional business mentality...” This is an approach or mind-set to business unlike what anyone has ever thought about previously. It’s radical and unconventional. This unique concept consumes businesses leaders and entrepreneurs, energizes them, and ultimately inspires them to create breakthrough companies, products, services, and ultimately, experiences.

“... designed to transform what Customers experience...” Revolutionary companies create “experience epiphanies” that fill a gap Customers didn’t know existed. World-class Customer service companies create enduring relationships and personal connections.

“... and employees experience.” Experience it forward. What employees experience, Customers will. The best marketing is happy, engaged employees. Your Customers will never be any happier than your employees.

“This shift produces a culture that permeates into people’s personal lives, at home, and in the community...” Genuine hospitality is not something you do; it is something that is in you. It is something in all areas of your life—with your Customers, employees, family, and neighbors. Service to others is what we owe for the privilege of living on this earth. It is the very purpose of life and not something you do only when it is convenient.

“... which in turn provides the business with higher sales, morale, and brand loyalty...” The only businesses surviving with long-term sustainability are the ones fanatical about differentiating themselves through the Customer experience they deliver.

“... making price irrelevant.” Based on the experience your Customers consistently receive, they have no idea what your competition charges.

**NEGATIVE CUES**

One of the biggest contributors to the Customer service crisis is management’s paranoia that Customers are out to take advantage of them. This leads to a significant amount of time that companies spend on creating and enforcing policy versus creating positive Customer experiences. Why do so many companies’ agreements and policies sound so angry? You should be friendly to your Customer in every way you communicate with them.

Your Customers experience your brand in so many different ways. It is not only the way your employees interact with your Customers, but it’s all the messages being sent to your Customers in countless ways. It is imperative you take a step back and review any negative cues that are making your business appear less than world-class.

Negative cues are everywhere! They are messages that businesses create that have negative language, that warn Customers, and that are intended for 2 percent of their Customer base but end up insulting 100 percent.

Negative cues come in many ways: signage displayed inside our businesses and outside our buildings; on our websites; in contracts, agreements, and...
The Customer Rebellion

Companies spend millions creating and advertising their brands, yet the Customer’s experience is what drives Customer perception. Consumers have less patience and are more outspoken than ever before. Customers are no longer tolerating subpar service, indifference, and unempathetic businesses, and they are standing up for themselves. They won’t take it anymore, which has resulted in the Customer rebellion.

For hundreds of years, the best form of advertising was word of mouth. Today, it is word of mouse. Social media represents a gigantic power shift back to the consumer. Now consumers can share their displeasure with thousands of others just with a click of a button. It takes twenty years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. Also, the Internet and technology have made Customers more demanding, and they expect information, answers, products, responses, and resolutions sooner than ASAP. As Sam Walton, founder of Walmart said, “There’s only one boss, the customer, and he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending money somewhere else or on something else.”

disclaimers; in spoken language and wording we use; in the physical actions of our employees and the way we dress; and basically anything that the Customer can see or hear. The vast majority of the time, you can say the same thing, but by rewording it you can make it sound like you are caring instead of threatening. Every interaction is a branding opportunity to articulate your genuine hospitality.

Verbal Negative Cues

Medical practices are the leaders in negative cues of all kinds. I have checked in for a doctor’s appointment and the receptionist has said, “We need to verify your information.” “Verify” makes me feel like they don’t believe who I am, that maybe I am trying to use someone else’s insurance information. Simply saying “May we update your information” works so much better and accomplishes the same thing. Another example is when a patient is being seen by a doctor and a nurse comes into the room during the exam and says “Your ten thirty is here” or “You have a call on line two.”

At that point, the patient is convinced the doctor is now rushing and more concerned with the patient who is waiting. Some great medical practices have created both verbal and nonverbal codes to inform the doctor without the patient realizing.

Signage

Signage has by far the highest occurrence of negative cues. I have taken so many pictures over the years of crazy negative signs I come across. What businesses put on signs amazes me. Let’s start with the most common negative signage we all see too often: “We charge $20 for all returned checks” and “We are not responsible for lost or stolen merchandise.”

The “Employees must wash hands” sign appears in the restrooms of restaurants that Customers use. This freaks me out, and I think, “You mean they might not?”

Now, I do understand that posting this sign is a requirement for most restaurants, but everything can be reworded. I saw a sign in a restroom of a restaurant that said it this way: “Cleanliness is important to us. We wash our hands before leaving.” This is so much better.

“Please wait to be seated”

Typically, you see a sign at the entrance of many restaurants that reads, “Please wait to be seated.” However, one time I walked into a restaurant where I was startled to see a positive cue: “It would be our pleasure to seat you.” Just the slight tweaking of the message can have a dramatic impact on the hospitable mood your business is setting for your Customer.

“Sales Guy”

A title is important. It informs the Customer of what your intention is—to benefit either them, or yourself and your company. What do you think of when you hear the titles “sales” or “salesman,” “VP of sales,” “sales associate,” or the “sales department”? I personally think of a person or group that is out to sell me, out to make a commission. To me, it is a negative connotation representing a hidden agenda. I am still in shock today that so many companies and service professionals still use the word “sales” in their titles. Even the title “business development” puts the emphasis more on the company’s goals than what is in the best interest of the Customers. I prefer account executive, service specialist, product consultant, service adviser. I had someone sending me a quote via email for insurance, and underneath his name was the title “Sales Guy.” That really didn’t make me want to do business with him.
Lessons learned
1. Remove “policy” from your employees’ vocabulary. This has become such a big issue, a crutch that reduces employees’ Service Aptitude and causes them to sometimes make horrible decisions because they are afraid of going against “company policy.”
2. As a company, own up. Don’t make excuses about why or how it happened. Just come out and say it was handled incorrectly, and that you will make sure it is never handled that way again.
3. Use your resources wisely. Focus on the right things and messages you enforce. What you are saying to your employees, Customers, and potential Customers sets the mind-set of what type of Customer experience your company is trying to deliver.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CUSTOMER

World-class Customer service companies make sure every employee walks in the shoes of their Customers.

Think about the Customer experience your business provides. How would you rate it? How would your employees rate it? How would your Customers rate it? The next time you have a large group of your employees together, ask them this question: How many of you feel we provide a superior Customer experience? I have asked this question hundreds of times. When the audience is made up primarily of one company, nearly every hand in that audience proudly goes up. It is easier to count the hands that are not raised. Typically, the vast majority of the group raises a hand, feeling quite confident that they and their company provide excellent Customer service.

Then I share study after study, demonstrating how companies and their employees rank themselves higher in Customer satisfaction than their Customers rank them. Not a slight difference—a dramatic difference.

Who’s right? The Customer! Companies need to know that they are in the Customer perception business.

Here is the million-dollar question: Why is there such a huge gap between what businesses think they provide in Customer experience and what their Customers think? You can spend hours on this question alone with your management teams, and the discussions and takeaways around this would be incredibly valuable.

When I ask, “Why do we (businesses/employees) feel we deliver Customer service so much better than the Customers rate us?” the two most common answers are (1) we don’t ask our Customers what they want, and (2) our Customers all have different wants and needs. Let’s look at both these common answers.

“Don’t ask our Customers what they want”

While learning from our Customers is critical to building the experience we deliver, many companies do a fairly good job measuring the Customers’ satisfaction through their own devices or have outside companies collecting this data. I agree this needs to be done; however, on the flip side, you can’t ask the Customer what they want; you have to give them what they can’t live without. Think about all the companies that have revolutionized their industries, broken the old paradigm, and turned everything on its head: Zappos, Amazon, Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and Apple. They didn’t improve on what everyone else was doing; they completely transformed the way it was being done.

“Our Customers all have different wants and needs”

This may be true, too, that many of our Customers have different needs. But before we go and throw our hands up in the air and say we can’t please everyone, remember that companies like the Ritz-Carlton, Amazon, and Chick-fil-A all have Customers with different needs as well. They have found a way to build an experience that consistently pleases the majority of their core Customers.

The Million-Dollar Answer

Here is the real answer to why we (the business/employees) feel we deliver Customer service so much better than our Customers perceive: we are not in our Customers’ shoes. We do not relate to their reality. We are not them and have never been them. A great example of this is one organization we worked with, a chain of nutritional-supplement retail stores. The chain’s average employee is a male, around twenty-two years old, in amazing shape. Its average Customer is a female, between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five, trying to lose weight. How can a buff young man—who can hit the gym for a few hours a day—conceivably relate to a forty-year-old mom who has virtually no free time on her hands, and who is struggling to lose twenty pounds? And if you can’t relate to someone else’s situation or circumstances, it is impossible to have any kind of empathy for them. Without empathy, you lack compassion and creativity.

World-class service organizations teach their employees to view things from the Customer’s perspective. Remember, many employees
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have never been their own Customer, have never needed the services and products their company provides, cannot comprehend what the Customer's mind-set is. Therefore, they do not relate well and find it difficult to empathize, be compassionate, and anticipate Customer needs.

LIVING AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

Each of us has the ability to impact thousands of people's lives through providing genuine care for others, whether it is called Customer service or human service. One of my favorite quotes is by author Marian Wright Edelman, who said, "Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time." However, it is critical that each of us understand the purpose of why we were given this amazing gift of life and what we were put here for, what we are to accomplish in the short time we have. You can't just deliver world-class service at work; it has to be something that is in you, in all areas of your life. It is who you are; it is the way you treat your family, neighbors, coworkers, Customers, and strangers. And remember, there are no strangers, just friends you haven't met yet.

I really like how actor Matthew McConaughey said it, while he accepted the Academy Award for best actor in a leading role for his part in Dallas Buyers Club: "My hero, that's who I chase... My hero is me in ten years. Every day, every week, every month, every year of my life, my hero is always ten years away. I am never going to be my hero, I am not going to attain that, I know I am not. That's just fine with me, because that keeps me with somebody to keep on chasing."

Personal Purpose Statement

Over the last ten years, I have had a personal purpose statement, a vision of what I want to accomplish in my lifetime, and which has served me greatly through good times and some very tough times. I have had this vision posted on my bathroom mirror, it is in my wallet, and it's on my desk in my office. It reads, "Live an extraordinary life so countless others do as well."

I don't want to live an extraordinary life so I have a bigger bank account, nicer car, house, and more toys. I know that if I live an extraordinary life, so many others will as a result.

Living an extraordinary life is living fully. I believe that we all have enormous potential inside each of us, and if there are parts of that potential that we do not develop, we are cheating the rest of the world out of the contribution that we could have made.

Filling a Gap Customers Didn’t Know Was There

There are no cashiers at the Apple Store; there are specialists—even "geniuses"—but no cashiers. There are no salespeople; there are consultants, concierges, experts, and personal shoppers—but no salespeople. Although the Apple Stores have no commissioned sales staff, they generate more revenue per square foot than most other widely recognized brands. Apple's famous glass-cube store on New York's Fifth Avenue reportedly generates higher sales per square foot than its neighbors, Saks and Tiffany's—significantly higher. Apple's revenue has been pegged at $4,032 per square foot per year. Compare that with Tiffany's at $2,600 or Best Buy at $930. After studying Customer service leaders, Apple arrived at several criteria that would help the Apple Stores stand apart:

- Design uncluttered stores.
- Allow Customers to test-drive products.
- Offer a concierge experience.
- Make it easy to buy.
- Offer one-to-one training.

Transformational breakthroughs are rarely the result of focus groups. Customers didn't ask for the iTunes store, but today they can't live without it. Customers didn't ask for the iPhone, but today millions of people can't live without it. Apple has innovated around the retail experience by changing people's expectations of what retail experience could be.
About the Author

John DiJulius is the president of The DiJulius Group, a customer service consulting firm, and has worked with top brands Ritz-Carlton, Lexus, Starbucks, Nordstrom, Harley-Davidson and others to raise the bar on excellent customer service. He is also the founder and owner of John Robert’s Spa, an upscale chain that has been named one of the Top 20 Salons in the United States.

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of The Customer Service Revolution, you may also want to check out these titles:

Scaling Up
by Verne Harnish

Be the Best at What Matters Most
by Joe Calloway

The Thank You Economy
by Gary Vaynerchuk

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