

Collingwood's Customer Service Model

Collingwood are currently delivering customer service training for companies and public sector organisations across the UK. Customer service is one of those topics that is very broad, and in this little article I am keen to provide a simple model which we use for achieving transformation in organisations.

There are many alternative terms for customer service. More recent thinking tends towards 'customer experience'. This simply places emphasis on consideration of the customer's wider experience of service – e.g. that it is their experience which counts, whatever your 'service' provision is. Another term is the 'customer journey'. I really support this term as it places emphasis on the many 'touch points' a customer might have – from the first phone call, various interactions with the organisation, receipt of 'goods', aftercare, and even how clean the loos were! This is a very valuable concept as it drives organisations to consider that every element of the 'journey' a customer goes on can and does affect their overall experience. For example, someone going through an operation with the NHS might well get the treatment and get better. But their journey is a six month experience involving the GP, specialists, different hospitals, letters, phone calls, treatment by nurses / medics, the food, the post operation care, medication / prescription services, the list goes on. Believe me, the fact that they get better is the minimum when it comes to providing a great customer journey, and all studies show that people who receive an excellent, caring journey through the system recover quicker – considerably quicker. Millions, if not billions of pounds could be saved if recovery times shortened. Evidence (even though you don't need it) that customer service / experience / journey can affect the bottom line.

So how do we do it? Well, firstly and most importantly, customer service is about people, and their behaviours and attitudes. You can tinker with your service and create systems and processes which help, but there will never be a system or process which will give someone the explanation that clears up their specific question or confusion, or responds in a personal way to them when they are stressed, confused and uncertain.

No matter what the service you are offering, your service is defined by the people providing it, and how much they care about the customer, and buy into the benefits of giving great experiences. Systems and processes ARE important, but they need to be driven by people, the customer and the staff. They need to cater for flexibility. We are all different. We all want different things.

Remember the term for Respect? 'Treat someone as you would want to be treated'? What rot. Why on earth would someone think that I need to be treated the same as them? What's clear to one person isn't to another. My language and terms of reference might be different. I might be using the service for the first time. I might be confident in the system or not. I might have special needs, be young, old, in a rush, the list goes on. How about 'treating people as **they** want to be treated'? Scary? Not really. It gives you license to understand that all you need to do is find out what an individual needs to know and feel, and tailor your service to them.

So when we get asked to deliver training, it's very much about assessing where an organisation is now and where it needs to be. Then it's about creating a learning environment where people feel free and confident to develop a new culture of service, which is driven and owned by them. They need to define and share the terms, practices,

and attitudes that will make their service work, and understand the benefits to the customer and to themselves.

Here's how we often approach a learning programme:

Landscape

- Introducing the customer service agenda
- Encourage sharing of experiences of service
- Developing a team approach to raising standards

Transaction

- Identify terms for quality customer experience
- Considering the dynamics of customer transactions and the customer response
- What would be the best possible response from a customer after a transaction

Context

- What do positive and negative experiences look like in real life for this organisation?
- What are the common barriers?
- How do attitudes and behaviours affect this?

Vision

- Identification of what great customer service looks like in the organisation
- What is the gap between where we are now and where we want to be?
- What common attitudes and behaviours are required to get there?

Attitude

- Exploring how our attitude defines the customer experience
- Establishing personal responsibility

Transformation

- Illustrating how transformed attitudes transform the customer experience
- Identifying what influences there are on our attitude at any given point

Self-awareness

- By really knowing ourselves we can control our state / attitude
- Techniques for influencing ourselves and others

Practice

- Safe and confidence building simulation of real interactions
- Practicing the implementation of new behaviours with customers

Culture

- Putting in place the environmental, cultural, and leadership pillars to support ongoing development
- Coaching and peer support ongoing

Delivering these programmes is always about working with you to understand the context of the organisation. Developing the workshop plans is one thing, but most importantly we aim for the interventions we make – half a day to weeks or months, to fit

with the wider organisational agenda, and how you intend to support and nurture the new culture we have developed. That's what makes any change sustainable. Any tick box activity on customer service, however good, is flawed.

Having identified the wider programme, the interventions we make (the training) share the following key styles of delivery:

- Facilitated, active discussions and activities
- Media or theatre based stimuli to put the learning in context
- Forum – the delegates defining standards and developing / sharing practices
- Simulation – controlled practice of delivering great service using actors as the customer (not role play – the delegates 'play' themselves and work with a partner)
- Coaching activities – developing delegates as coaches to each other as they share ideas and practice
- Refining – techniques to consolidate ideas into shared terms, values, behaviours and aspirations
- Evaluation and measurement (both short and long term options)

To see our work on Customer Service in action, don't hesitate to contact us. I can assure you of a good customer journey!

Chris Simes