

Add Value - And Kill Mediocrity in Customer Service

By John Madden

There are two kinds of customer service we all experience occasionally, *outstanding customer service*, and *bad customer service*. What we experience most of the time is *mediocre customer service*.

Mediocre is a strong word for average. That's where your experience as a customer is not memorable, nothing special - under-whelming might be a good word!

The problem with mediocre service is that it doesn't give you a competitive edge. You simply compete with all the other businesses like yours who keep undercutting each other on price and quality to stay in business.

I asked a group at one of my seminars to write down the name of places they'd gone to do business that they considered outstanding, and then we discussed why they considered them outstanding. Nobody came up with more than one name, and some couldn't think of any business they considered outstanding.

In all cases the outstanding businesses had one thing in common, they did something that mediocre businesses don't do. *They added value.*

They gave you something you didn't expect. They often surprised you. They had more of a personal touch. They handled problems more quickly and with a sense of urgency. They followed up on a promise. They remembered your name and smiled when they said it. They thanked you for your business, and meant it in their voice. They trained their people and validated their contribution to the success of the business.

My local restaurant, Yia Yia's Euro Bistro is a great example. I was dining at the bar one evening with a client from England. My client expressed disappointment that Yia Yia's didn't have a baked potato on the menu to go with the steak he ordered.

The bartender, Joe, said. "Sir, if you don't mind waiting just a little bit longer we'll get you a baked potato. Joe got one of the waiters to drive down the street to a neighboring restaurant and return with a hot baked potato.

My client was amazed. I wasn't - because this is typical of what this restaurant does to delight its customers. Which is why it enjoys its solid reputation and success. Could it be something to do with the philosophy of the owners and management team?

Understand that in today's global economy, loaded with options, customers are demanding that products and services be faster, better quality, and cheaper; so, in order to be really competitive we have to be more creative

in finding and keeping customers, more disciplined in controlling our costs, and more responsive to customer concerns.

In short, we need to be more than average. We need to kill mediocrity. We need to *add value*. Here are some ways to add value and move from *mediocrity* to *outstanding* in your business:

1. Surprise your customers with something extra, without an extra charge.
2. Do something different and better than your competition, like Great Harvest Bakery who invites you in for a free slice of freshly baked bread and makes you feel at home whether you buy or not at the time.
3. Anticipate your customers' needs, like the bellman in a Philadelphia hotel who gave me a complimentary map of the city, knowing it was my first time driving there.
4. Make your customer feel important with a compliment, or by remembering her name, like Peggy at Sumner Regional Medical Center who said I had a great tie as she greeted me upon entering the building.
5. Help your customer's business by sharing an article, by giving a referral, or by introducing him to another customer.

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