

## **The Green Mile: Fallacy of Customer Service**

There was a recent article which stated that it's not possible to achieve 100% customer satisfaction and the investment needed to improve customer satisfaction levels beyond a certain level is just not worth the effort in terms of customer retention or improvement in top-line.

This perhaps indicates the state of affairs on the level of importance associated with providing a complete experience to customers. Hope that companies which do read the above article do not misinterpret it and use it as a means to stop evangelizing "good customer experience" as a tenet.

Our secondary research on customer experiences through various websites/ blogs/ forums indicate that there are many customers who are quite satisfied with the experience associated with their purchase of a product or service. A credit card customer complaining about issues with billing and card closure, a car customer raising issues on the service and product related support from the company..and the list is endless.

These experiences tell a sad tale. Customer relationships' are often killed due to actions or inaction of the company providing the product/ service. For every four weddings (a customer engaging with a company) there will be one funeral!! The funeral is the death of the relationship where the customer is forced to walk the "green mile".

So what's the issue? Several companies do not have a sound customer experience strategy in place. The question to ask is – have they gone beyond speeches/ rhetoric on customer service? Providing good customer service requires a different kind of approach, mindset and attitude. It requires a strong resolve and the ability to rise above short term budget issues. It requires focus on skilling people, establishing the right processes and commitment from all levels of the organization.

Companies spend a lot of money on acquiring customers. But how much money do they spend on retaining customers?

Many believe that providing good service has a price and only the large corporate houses can invest in it. The smaller or mid-size companies do not have to worry about service. An interesting case was narrated by a passenger of a low cost airline. The passenger, an elderly lady, was waiting for baggage on arrival. She needed some assistance and she asked the lone airline rep there for help. The rep told her "You are not flying Xyz airline. Xyz which provides valet service. This is a low cost carrier so help yourself." On the other hand take the example of pest control of India. They proactively remind you of service due dates and call to fix an appointment. Their people who come to do service are perfect in the way they handle the call. Irrespective of who comes, a standard protocol is followed in terms of handling the service call.

There are several reasons that could be responsible for this. Many companies, especially product companies, outsource their service processes. The core business driver for this is to bring down service costs. Now the company which owns the responsibility now tries to cut corners so as to make profits. They invariably do not invest in getting the right kind of people or developing people and providing them with the appropriate skills. They do not standardize processes. All these lead to service failures. The companies which outsource also do make it easy for customers to connect with them. So a customer is left in the lurch without many options.

Its not too late, all companies (product/ service – B2B or B2C) can still work to make a difference. They ensure all customer touch points are managed well and customers have a great experience. This will definitely ensure a strong and loyal customer base and an enhanced top-line.

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***One in a series of thought articles from Breakthrough Management Group India***

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