

Delighting Your Customer – The ‘+1’ Way

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In this article we introduce the concept of Customer Service ‘+1s’ (Ken Blanchard – ‘Raving Fans’) and focus on how its implementation in the workplace could lead to higher overall standards, happier customers and ultimately better business processes.

We also look at potential barriers that may exist when implementing a customer orientated policy and give a few simple but effective suggestions on implementing “+1s” in the workplace.

Simply put, the concept of “+1s” is exceeding customer expectations at every possible opportunity using three simple principles.

The 3 Principles of “+1s”

• Costs Little or nothing

• Quick and easy to do

• Instantly Noticed and Valued

These principles make sure that any changes in customer service are economically viable (‘cost little or nothing’), don’t change the process too much (‘quick and easy to do’) and have an effective outcome (‘instantly noticed and valued by the customer’). They also ensure that the implementation of “+1s” can occur in the vast majority of working situations. In practice, “+1” is a mechanism that allows the firm to positively react to a service complaint. Once a complaint has been made, the firm can diagnose the problem and introduce cost effective, seamless changes in its service to resolve the highlighted issue without impacting heavily on costs and retraining of staff.

When purchasing from a company, people not only want a product or service, they expect to gain an overall experience from a transaction. The whole process of purchasing a product or service is an experience that a customer must undergo in order to obtain the use of the products/services in question. The implementation of a “+1” system into a workplace will most undoubtedly have a positive effect on the overall experience (as long as the minor changes in working practice are what the customers want). The interaction between the company and its customers is a key factor in the embedding process of the customer’s perception of the company. By giving the customer more than they expect, a company will almost certainly give a better impression of its overall value to that

customer; this could lead to a plethora of benefits such as increased sales from that customer, referrals by that customer and an elevated public image.

The key aim of the “+1” concept is to exceed the requirements that a customer expects from this experience.

Customer Delight = Expectations +1

However by continually elevating the standard service using economical, seamless and efficient means could leave companies with a medium term quandary.

Once customer service standards are raised, the customer’s expectation of the level of service is also raised. This higher level of customer service is now expected to be the “norm”, and is required on every interaction that the customer has with the company.

The failure by companies to consistently deliver exceptional service will lead to customers getting only what they expect and not more. This will ultimately lead to a feeling of disappointment by not exceeding the “standard” service. If the “+1” system is to be successful in the long term then it has to be sustained in the customer service practices.

Potential Barriers to Enhancing Customer Service

Negative Staff Attitudes

If the people who are implementing customer service don’t fully support and back the changes made to the process then the overall success of the “+1” scheme could be questioned. By getting all members of staff on board, the organisation can only benefit from the enthusiasm, support and understanding of their largest asset – people. Not to mention an increase in potential for generating new ideas and concepts that fit their customer base.

Short Term Thinking

“Production line” thinking of customer throughput can lead to low customer retention rates. In these situations the customers could benefit from members of staff spending more time with them. However, the validity of using this policy is contingent to the given situation and the time dependencies of the customer.

Uncooperative Structures

Poor systems and processes could lead to confusion, and ultimately disgruntled customers. It is important that boundaries, procedures, staff roles and responsibilities are formalized, so each member of staff has a clear understanding of the customer service policy and is committed to its success in the workplace.

Communication with Customers

By listening to what the customer wants and needs, a company can understand what aspects of its customer service will add value to the customer’s overall experience. By providing customers with a clear channel of communication, Companies encourage customer feedback and can gain insight into how they can improve their business practices.

Customer Service Department

Is Customer Services a dumping ground for a company's problems or a key department for developing solutions? It often suffers from mistaken perception and is left with problems more suited to be handled by other departments. A formulated structure of each department's responsibility to their customer support could improve efficiency and overall effectiveness.

Top Five Tips of Implementing "+1s"

- 1) Choose a simple, single message, e.g. reflective listening
- 2) Communicate the Customer Service Message
- 3) Set clear boundaries of what each department is responsible for with regards to its customer interactions
- 4) Under Promise and Over Deliver
- 5) Develop a greater insight into where you are now and where you can get to, by inviting Customers and Staff opinions

In conclusion, the "+1" system is a fantastic opportunity for a company to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors. By following the three main principles, a company can improve its systems and procedures for handling customers and develop its business potential. Although there may be varying barriers to implementing a "+1" system in the workplace, the greatest obstacle to its long term success is the Company's sustainability of using this model.

Beware! Complacency in continually improving customer service could lead to customer disappointment and potentially lower the level of customer retention.

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