

Service Quality Is Not Enough

By Colin Bates

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Service quality is essential (of course!) but service quality alone is not enough:

Service with character makes the difference...

If your company is focusing only on service quality you are missing an opportunity to differentiate yourself, because it is service with a distinctive character that makes the difference. Let me give you an example from my home country, the UK....

The two dominant airlines are British Airways and Virgin Atlantic: two great companies, both offering very high quality service. What differentiates them? Not the service quality, but the service character.

British Airways service is classic old British 'establishment': all "yes sir, no sir, may I take your coat sir?". (Not quite that bad, but I think you know what I mean!).

Virgin Atlantic service is the complete opposite, a modern kind of 'Cool Britannia': much more friendly and informal: with the crew passing around ice-creams when the movies are on and offering relaxing head massages.

So it is the character of service that differentiates them, that literally 'makes the difference' to loyal passengers of both airlines.

The two elements of service character, and how to build them...

Service character can be thought of as having two elements. The first is the behavior of the front-line staff themselves. The second are the 'features' of the service (such as those ice-creams and massages that I mentioned).

These two elements of service character work together to create the brand experience, which itself should be an expression of the desired brand.

So both elements require a very clear understanding of the brand that you are trying to build.

From there you need to look at your HR recruitment and training practices to ensure that they are really working as hard as they should to support the brand experience: recruiting the right people for the brand and training them in service character as well as service quality.

And finally, it is always worth brainstorming or 'workshopping' to evaluate the service features and how they can be further developed to reflect the service character that will build your desired brand.

Ask yourself:

Is the character of our service consistent?

Does it support our desired brand?

Is there more that we could do to build distinctive brand character into our service: either in terms of staff behavior or service features?

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