

# Are Satisfied Customers Loyal Customers?

By Jurek Leon

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This was one of the key questions addressed by a number of speakers at the European Conference on Customer Management in April and at the World Conference on Customer Management held in Orlando, Florida around the same time.

The conclusion reached was an emphatic “NO”.

Does this then mean, as many battle weary managers and front line service providers often suggest, that “customers today show no loyalty – all they care about is price”?

The answer to this question is also “NO”.

While up to 16% of people may go elsewhere based on price, the other 84% do care about and consider other factors as long as they have evidence that we care about and consider them.

Lets explore some of the lessons to be learned from this.

Every customer who walks into, phones, emails or in some other way comes in contact with your business is assessing you, often without even realising they are doing it. They will match you against their expectations which may be based on previous experience with your organisation or with similar organisations, word of mouth recommendations and warnings or your promotional promise.

As a result of this assessment you will be judged either as better than expected, much as expected or a disappointment.

In other words, the customer is either delighted, satisfied or dissatisfied with your products and service.

Much of the effort made by companies in customer service programmes is aimed at ensuring they have satisfied customers and in reducing the causes of dissatisfaction. The assumption being that this should be enough to retain a loyal customer base.

Often the questions and the measures used in customer research are designed to identify

(a) Are our products satisfactory?

(b) Is our service satisfactory?

The really brave organisations may go on to ask

(c) Have we done enough to earn your loyalty?

(d) If not, what can we do to earn it?

These are good questions but it seems they aren't identifying whether the relationships we are forging with our customers are strong enough to earn and retain their loyalty.

The reason is that they are being asked at the logical level. They need to be supplemented with questions that elicit responses at the emotional level. In other words, we need to find out how our customers find the experience of dealing with us. We need to know what they feel as well as what they think.

At the European Conference, UK service guru Chris Daffy illustrated this with the following model for managing the customer experience.

He emphasised that matching customers needs is a given, it's expected. To earn our customers loyalty we have to be noticed, which means we must do something extra or different. And do it with emotion. In other words, be passionate about providing great service.

A key point to stress here is that moving from "matching customer needs" to "adding something extra and doing it with emotion" need not be an expensive process. It is not a way of bribing customers so that they make you their first choice for the products and services you provide. But, it does take an obsession with doing that little bit extra and doing it in a way that demonstrates that you genuinely care.

It's a about discovering what the customer wants and delivering it 'Plus One' with feeling.

Do that and you are on your way to earning your customer's loyalty and getting more than your fair share of their business.

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