

Try The Vest On For Size!

By Anne M. Obarski

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When I think of outstanding customer service there are two companies that always come to mind for me, one is Nordstrom's, and the other is Wal-Mart. They are two totally different retail companies in terms of their merchandise assortment, however they are very similar in how they treat their employees as well as their customers.

Recently, there was a great article in my local paper about a Wal-Mart store in the Pittsburgh area. It seems that David Glass; CEO of Wal-Mart was there for the day. Now it is not unusual for retail executives to visit stores, as a matter of fact, it is a common practice. However, this visit was unusual. It seems Mr. Glass told the chain's 800,000 employees that if they had a spectacular 1997, he would spend a day as a greeter at the top-selling store in that chain. Well, I'm proud to say that the store that won the honor was right here in Pittsburgh, PA. But what made it so memorable was how David Glass spent the day. He strapped on the Wal-Mart vest and greeted babies and older customers and stood with fellow workers to have his picture taken. You see, he was just one of the "associates" who was there to greet and help the customer.

How often I hear from clients that they are very concerned about customer service yet I don't think they really convey that idea from the top executives down to the stock room associate. There are two principles at work here:

1. Work at finding ways to make the employee feel important to the organization.
2. When the employee is happy in their job, they will not have to work at customer service, it will happen naturally.

Wal-Mart treats their employees like family, and with over 3,300 stores and 800,000 employees they manage to do it with outstanding results. It is a formula that works. It's the golden rule, with lots of sparkle!

Take some time and look at how you treat your employees before you start focusing on customer service. Your mission statement should start with your employees. Take care of those who take care of you. Without those front line people, ask yourself where your business would be. Isn't it time for you to use some old-fashioned elbow grease on that golden rule in your organization? Work inward so that the shine is outward!

P.S. Maybe it also wouldn't hurt to try "the vest " on for a day! You may just learn the true meaning of the words "May I Help You"!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant, and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne presents keynotes, seminars and workshops nationwide. She works with companies who are performance, profit and people focused and helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com> or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>

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