

## Exceptional Customer Service

Not long ago, some Gazette readers contributed their tales of woe regarding the state of customer service. The companies in question were big names and this caused me to think about how, in the arena of customer service, it's the smaller players that have the upper hand. I sometimes hear from small business owners that it is difficult to compete with the big boys; however, when it comes to customer service, this is where small and medium sized companies have the advantage.

Small and medium sized companies are still in control of how their staff attends to the needs of the clients. In most instances, the owners know all the staff by name, they're not outsourcing, and in many ways, they're hands-on managers. This allows a wonderful opportunity to share ideas on what great customer service means to your organization.

Off-the shelf programs are many and can definitely provide the means to get everyone off to a good start. But if you're seriously thinking about improving the service you provide your customers, a better start would be to conduct a series of problem solving workshops with your employees. How do you want to be treated when making a call to a service provider? Have you asked this of your staff? Get them in on the act – what do they think makes up a great customer service team? Brainstorm, get ideas flowing to better understand the challenges your staff face, and work together to overcome them.

Once these workshops are completed, you will be in a better position to know whether a training program is required and if so, identifying one that fits your specific needs will be simpler. The last step would be to incorporate your new found knowledge into a standard orientation and training plan that addresses the requirements of new staff and supports the ongoing coaching of existing staff.

If you're contemplating adding to your existing staff, ensuring that you're hiring the right people at the onset gives you a definite advantage towards exceptional customer service. There are many assessment tools available to assure a great fit, and if asked, I would be happy to discuss the pros and cons of the ones I am aware of, but ultimately I'd suggest the program I use myself.

There are many questions that can be asked of yourselves, your clients and your staff to guarantee that clients' needs are met - not just effectively, but brilliantly.



When it comes to customer service, it's the small and medium sized companies that can truly shine.

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