



The Customer Experience

When's the last time you purchased something from your company? When's the last time you returned a product to your company? If you haven't done either one in the last few years, it might be time to "walk a mile in your customers' shoes" to see if the journey is a comfortable one.

I am reminded of the customer experience every time I travel. There are so many different vendors, people and companies impacting the customer experience. Here are a few areas that are common in any business, which positively or negatively impact the customer experience.

Smile. I really love seeing teeth at the airport and too often, it's a rare sight. (Did anyone hiring airport personnel tell them they would be interfacing with customers?) I want the person handling my baggage, checking my ID or taking my money at the restaurant to smile. It's a very simple principle to install at your company: when someone gives you money, smile. I recently flew on Frontier and the flight attendant, John Arcri, obviously understood this concept. He greeted passengers with a smile, handed out snacks with a smile and said good-bye with a smile. It's one of the many reasons I fly Frontier. Take the smile test at your company and see if your team passes. It's an inexpensive way to acquire and retain customers.

Humor. The least fun place at the airport is the security line. Talk about a place that could use a process improvement expert and a full-time motivational speaker. You hurry to remove belts, shoes and jackets only to continue hurrying so you can grab bags that are being smashed against twelve other bags. On my last flight, a TSA agent made this whole **non** six sigma process more bearable with his sense of humor. As he was coaching passengers entering the security line zone, he said, Please remove your computers, shoes and three hundred pound belt buckle. We like you, however, know you do not want to spend the day with us." Passengers were laughing and a stressful situation turned into fun. Make it a goal at your company to make one customer laugh each day.

Communication. Anyone ever sat on a plane that is delayed, wondering what happened to the pilot and co-pilot? No one likes bad news; however, people prefer bad news over no news. I've had both experiences with airlines. In some cases, it was 'days' before the pilot spoke up and explained the cause of the delay. In other cases, the pilot was customer focused and communicated bad news on a regular basis. Guess which customers were less irritated? Your customers are no different. If the company is missing deadlines, get in your car; get on your phone and communicate the bad news. You won't lose customers over bad news; you will lose customers who are left in the dark looking for a glimmer of customer service.

So give your organization a call and do business. Check to see if your company passes the smile, humor and communication test.