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P R O F E S S I O N A L

RETAIL STORE

MAINTENANCE®

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MICHAELS' MAINTENANCE: SKILLED AT ITS CRAFT



Michaels
THE ARTS & CRAFTS STORE

PLUS:

- Maintaining H-E-B Grocery Stores
- How Dollar Tree Handles New Store Rollouts
- Borders' Proactive HVAC Replacement
- Correcting Corrosion In Fire Sprinklers
 - An Energy Management Case Study
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MORE KEYS TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Viewing quality through your customer's eyes. | **Martin Benom**



Martin Benom, CEO,
The Resource
Collection

Interesting similarities exist between retailers and facility service providers. Every retailer and facility service provider in business today is involved in supplying services and/or products to people and organizations called “customers.” It is critical for their managers to regularly step back and reflect on the fact that the success or failure of their enterprise rests almost exclusively in their customer's hands. After all, customers are the ones who pay for the services and products we provide and, in the end, make it possible for our businesses to succeed or fail. In fact, the customer's experiences frequently serve as the competitive difference or the tie-breaker in their decision to utilize the services or buy the product from one source or another. When an organization has a customer focus which maximizes each and every moment with the customer in the most positive manner possible, it creates and builds long term loyalty and customers actually begin to advocate for the company. On the other hand, we can work hard to build a culture of quality and focus on quality assurance — but if our customers don't recognize it, we've missed it completely and can quickly find our operation in grave danger!

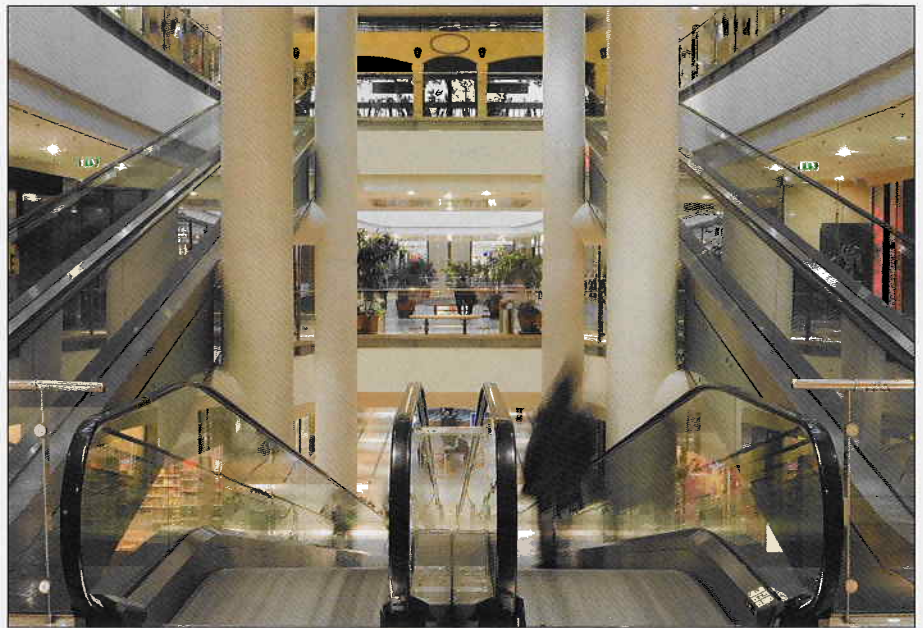
Sam Walton, founder of the Wal-Mart empire, outlined 10 “Rules for Building a Business,” which became the foundation for Wal-Mart's corporate culture. Rule #8, according to Walton's autobiography, goes like this: “Exceed your customers' expecta-

tions. If you do, they'll come back over and over. Give them what they want — and a little more. Let them know you appreciate them. Make good on all your mistakes and don't make excuses — apologize. Stand behind everything you do. The two most important words I ever wrote were on that first Wal-Mart sign, ‘Satisfaction Guaranteed.’ They're still up there and they have made all the difference.”

It's been said that a satisfied customer tells one person while a customer that is dissatisfied tells 10 or more. We must always remember that customers influence the satisfaction of other customers — guaranteed! Furthermore, it is the customers themselves who define a quality experience with our companies. Author Michael Levine says that operational details, such as limited

hours and dirty bathrooms, send a message to customers about the general quality of a business. What about a fitting room where the door does not close or the paint is peeling or the carpet is dirty? These details have a more significant effect on customers than someone not familiar with the retail industry might think. So, for a working definition of quality customer experience, we will say that “quality customer experience depends upon the perception of quality experienced by the customer at any point of contact with a company.”

In our efforts to delight customers and build loyalty, we would be remiss if we didn't at least mention how important it is to look first within our own companies. Business philosopher Jim Rohn suggests, “We don't hire individuals and teach them



If you work hard to build a culture of quality and focus on quality assurance — but then your customers don't recognize it, then you've missed the point completely.

to be nice, we simply hire nice people — what a clever shortcut.” Equally important, how we treat our employees has a direct effect on how they treat our customers, which then clearly influences the type of experience those customers have with us. We can’t simply tell our people to smile more and be nicer. The service they provide our customers is a direct outcome of good internal management, employee relations and training.

What does quality customer experience look like from a customer’s perspective? While it can be difficult and sometimes expensive to measure, it will likely include several factors. Whether via surveys or unsolicited, customers will let you know by way of direct responses saying they’re satisfied, whether by e-mails, letters or phone calls. These multiple channels of communication must be evaluated to provide an objective measurement of the quality of an interaction. Responses can be both solicited (such as with surveys) as well as unsolicited. Letters or e-mails may describe a situation in which they were particularly pleased with a specific employee or level of service they experienced, e.g. anticipating a customer’s need — and then acting to fulfill that need before the customer asked. Other customer communications may detail a particularly difficult situation handled well and quickly by an employee. At the center of each of these instances, you will likely find an employee who understands, agrees with — and contributes to — the company’s culture of quality.

Unfortunately, unsolicited positive communication is the exception rather than the norm. More often, you will need to solicit your customers’ feedback via surveys or questionnaires. If you don’t have a questionnaire process in place to monitor satisfaction levels, it would be good to start as soon as possible. All you need is a simple form that can be answered easily and quickly, essentially asking if they’re satisfied with your company, your products and the service they received. You can ask them several ways:

- In person while your supervisors are conducting a site inspection.
- Via telephone.
- Via mail. This is a technique that has been used for many years and has very predictable results.
- Via email — whether as an emailed set of



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questions they answer and reply back or as an invitation to a specific survey site.

Sam Walton was right; when customers see quality — and when you exceed their expectations, they keep coming back...and they stop leaving. Look at your customer-retention ratios (the percentage of customers you are retaining versus losing on an annual basis). If your ratio is at or above 80% to 90% (allowing for errors in collection and analysis), your customers are perceiving quality and your efforts at quality assurance throughout your organization are paying off.

In order to translate the brand promise into an operational reality that creates satisfied, loyal and profitable customer advocates, customer experience management must be part of a total quality management program, one that is continually aggressive at identifying areas where errors most often take place and then defining the root cause(s) for the failures. When they occur, an immediate and concrete corrective response should be taken, followed by a permanent response to the identified root cause. Most of the time, you will find they take place in one or more of three general areas: (1) people, (2) technology or (3) condition of physical areas.

PEOPLE

The “people” area is one in which the individual representing the company may

simply be lazy, have a bad attitude, have had a bad day, did not receive proper training or they didn’t prepare well for the work they have been asked to perform. Another cause could be the stress of daily life in our society. Studies suggest that when people are under stress they tend to respond emotionally rather than logically. The result of a relationship between a retail sales person and their client is typically fairly obvious. In the relationship between a facility service vendor and corporate management and store management can present many problems. Your service vendor shows up to a remote site with an entire crew — only to find that the site store manager had no idea they were coming and has another internal project in process, making it impossible for the service crew to do their work. Too often, communications are inadequate or incomplete between centralized facilities management, service providers and remote locations. In such cases, a professional service vendor can significantly assist their customer by thoroughly documenting and communicating what the scope the work will entail with the store manager, including the logistics and physical requirements (like aisles needing to be free of pallets for a floor refinishing project or merchandise needing to be moved away from a window being tinted, replaced or washed). For work other than standard or normally reoccurring maintenance, it is imperative that a site inspection be conducted a day or two

before the work is to be done and the site manager be informed of the conditions necessary for successful completion of the project.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology has come along way to help companies implement and sustain the optimal customer experience across customer touch points. Customer technology errors are more often than not the result of poor training or lack of understanding. When you have expectations that your customers will utilize technology in their interactions with your company, you must insure that the technology is well-designed for its intended use, easy to use, accessible and well supported. Assuring these items dramatically reduces the potential for customer difficulty and misunderstandings.

CONDITION OF PHYSICAL AREAS

The condition of physical areas has to do with the way physical work areas are arranged. Areas to be closed off need clear

signage and efficient barriers. This especially includes such items as any odors that may result from work that might be done (such as painting or other work involving chemicals). The key to managing any factor that may impact the customers' experience in a less than desirable way is to manage their expectations. Customers should be alerted in advance that the work to be done overnight may have residual odors in the morning — but that the odors are not harmful — and you have the MSDS documentation to prove it. This allows the store managers to preempt any complaints by alerting all parties ahead of time. These extra efforts to communicate, such as posting a sign that work is being performed, contribute a nicer customer environment and manner in which customers view the actual painting efforts rather than having them feel they are being put out.

The bottom line is that customers are every company's lifeblood and without them there is no business. When a company focuses on quality and developing a

culture of quality, it should not overlook ensuring its own employees as well as its clients understand the importance of the customer's satisfaction. It is important to evaluate whether the customers agree. Do they recognize the quality? A customer-oriented company, whether retailer or facility service vendor, who is constantly asking customers about the quality of service and instantly addressing deficiencies will always be leading the competition. How do your customers view you? Do you know? It just may be that customer experience is king!

PRSM

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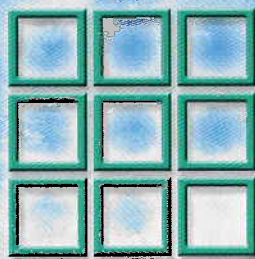
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