



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: OH, YEAH, I FORGOT! WE ARE HERE FOR OUR CUSTOMERS

With all the focus on social media, trade wars, bottom line, diversity, operational efficiencies, and so on ... we can sometimes forget about the customer. Just look at your leadership agenda.

Do you know who your customer(s) are?

Do you know what your customers need today and tomorrow, and how their needs have changed in the past five years?

Are your customers internal or external? Both? Are your mission, vision, values, and strategic plan designed around your customer or around the internal issues that you discussed at your last retreat? Organizations that are so internally focused often forget that, without your end buyer (aka your customer), you will sink. This is true for organizations in all sectors.

Recently, I traveled from San Diego to San Antonio on Southwest Airlines. They were moving two male koala bears from the San Diego Zoo to the San Antonio Zoo.

The trained handlers (keepers) were there with the animals, which were safely in carrying cases. The koalas were in the first two rows of the plane. Then came the eucalyptus. The Southwest Flight attendant said over the PA, "Today, instead of peanuts and pretzels we will be serving eucalyptus as a matter of recognition for our special passengers... the koala bears." Moments later, several flight attendants proceeded throughout the plane giving each passenger an adorable plush koala bear to take home. Everyone on the plane was delighted. This was a smart move since koala bears have a special smell and many people were sneezing due to the unique combination of koala bear and eucalyptus in the air. During the flight, the keepers allowed one passenger at a time to talk with them and learn more about the koalas. The keepers also shared over the PA information about the koalas, their eating and sleeping habits (20 hours per day) and more...

When we deplaned in San Antonio, the San Antonio News was there to witness the outpour of 150 to 200 passengers with plush koala bears. It was a totally intelligent customer experience and marketing strategy. Well-played Southwest and the marketing team!

It would have been easy for Southwest Airlines to carry the (actual) koala bears without paying any attention to the opportunity. Instead, passengers deplaned with a koala and a story. I carried my koala to an executive team coaching program in San Antonio and told the story to at least 20 people. The koala then flew with me from San Antonio to Washington DC. On that flight, I sat next to a veteran who lost both legs in Iraq. We had great laughs with the koala and it actually played a role in our discussions. Then onto a car ride, hotel, and DC meeting – and more stories. Finally, in DC, I boarded my plane home and Mitt Romney sat next to me. I told Mitt too of the story regarding Southwest, the koala and the veteran. If each person on my flight to San Antonio told even 5 to 10 people about Southwest's good will gesture, that would be about 750 to 2,000 positive marketing impressions for Southwest.

See the following, from [HubSpot](#), on customer satisfaction:

Customer Satisfaction: The Ultimate Guide: How to Measure, Improve, and Manage Customer Satisfaction to Grow Your Business:

“If you don’t satisfy your customers, your business will fail.

The data backs this up.

HubSpot Research found that growing businesses are more likely to prioritize customer success than those with stagnant or decreasing revenue. Successful customers can become your best salespeople, as well; our research shows that 77% of people have shared positive experiences with companies in the past year.

Furthermore, keeping your current customers happy is good business in the long term. Common business wisdom tells you that acquiring customers is 5 to 25 times more expensive than keeping current customers.

A bad customer experience or bad customer service is also a leading indicator of customer churn (which is massively detrimental to growth).

In our 2018 State of Inbound report, 61% of respondents noted "generating traffic and leads" as their number one marketing challenge, which can probably be tied back to another problem: They’re also struggling to keep their existing customers.

A business simply can’t grow sustainably if it has a churn problem, and we can find early red flags of churn by gauging customer satisfaction (and working to improve it over time).”

There are opportunities in your company/organization every day for intelligent customer interactions. How well are you managing yours? If your customers aren’t on your agenda – what are you doing in your chair?