



# How to build a better customer service culture in your business

| Posted by: **Ron Kaufman** in Customer experience |

**A strong service culture leads to sustained improvements to customer experience, and a sustainable competitive advantage for organisations. But where do you start?**

The commoditisation of products and services makes competing on price or features hard to sustain. Customers have more choice than ever, and it is easier than ever to switch suppliers. Organisations must work smarter to create relationships and sustain loyalty.

Globalisation, connective technology and maturing markets also mean customers are increasingly sophisticated and expectations of superior service are rising. Organisations must continuously innovate and improve to create more value for customers, colleagues and partners.

Focusing on service means an organisation can create more unique experiences that

customers value. This leads to opportunities for higher margins and helps create relationships with customers that last longer — and become more profitable over time.

## Why service culture

As more businesses realise excellent customer service can be a competitive advantage, the big question is not how to improve service performance, but how to create a culture of continuous service improvement with an unwavering focus on customer experience.

To successfully – and sustainably – differentiate based on service, improving customer experience must be the responsibility of an entire organization, not only a customer service department. Organisations must create an environment to motivate, support and recognise employees for consistently taking action to create value for customers and colleagues.

A service culture also creates a better place to work. This engages and motivates



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employees to improve performance and helps organisations attract and retain superior talent.

## **Service education, not training**

Many organisations spend heavily on customer service training, then wonder why no substantial improvements are made or why enthusiasm stalls shortly after training.

Service training teaches someone how to ‘do’ something: provide quality in a specific situation. Training, by its nature, is tactical, prescriptive and usually differs between functions and departments.

This approach can result in a fragmented understanding of service inside the organisation. It can also leave employees unsure about what to do when they encounter a situation or request they have not been previously trained to handle.

This leads to an inability to meet customers’ needs and to frequent escalations that take time and resources to resolve — with no guarantee of a desirable outcome for the customer.

By contrast, service education teaches fundamental service principles that everyone can apply to their own jobs — regardless of role, function or level within the organisation. With service education, employees learn to think proactively and responsively, and then act in an empowered manner to create value for their customers and colleagues. Service education creates a solid foundation – a shared understanding of the customer and a common language throughout the organization to talk about customer experience and service improvements.

## **Build a service culture**

To build a service culture, organisations must sustain focus in three key areas: service leadership, service education and ‘The 12 Building Blocks’ of service culture support:

- 1. Common service language** - Understood and frequently used by service providers at all levels and in all parts of the organisation, a common service language enables clear communication and supports the delivery

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of superior internal and external service.

**2. Engaging service vision**

- Widely embraced and believed, an engaging service vision energises everyone in the organisation. Each person knows how the vision applies to their work and knows what action to take to make the vision real.

**3. Service recruitment**

- Effective recruitment strategies and tactics attract people who support your organisation's vision, and keep out those who may be technically qualified but not aligned with the service spirit and purpose of the organisation.

**4. Service orientation**

- Your service orientation for new staff members is motivating, encouraging and effective. New team members feel welcome and inspired to contribute to your service culture.

**5. Service communications**

- Service communications inform, educate and motivate the entire organisation. Creative communication channels surround everyone with relevant service information, timely customer feedback, uplifting success stories, and current challenges and objectives.

**6. Service recognition and rewards**

- Recognition and reward motivate your team to celebrate service improvements. Incentives, acknowledgement, prizes, promotions and praise all focus attention and encourage greater service results.

**7. Voice of the customer**

- Effective customer contact and feedback systems capture current comments, compliments and complaints. This vital voice of the customer is anticipated and appreciated by every service provider in your organisation.

**8. Service measures and metrics**

- Measuring what matters focuses attention and leads to positive results in many areas: market share, profitability, reputation, customer loyalty and satisfaction, employee engagement and performance improvement. We help you understand the measurements to use and pitfalls to avoid.

**9. Service improvement process**

- Continuous service improvement can be everyone's ongoing project and passion. Engage your team members with workshops, initiatives, contests and suggestion programs that educate, motivate and empower.

**10. Service recovery and guarantees**

- When things go wrong, bounce back! Effective service recovery and guarantees will turn upset customers into loyal advocates and team members into true believers.

**11. Service benchmarking**

- Discover and apply best practices of leading organisations inside and outside your industry. Service benchmarking reveals what others do to improve their service, and points to new ways you can upgrade yours.



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## 12. Service role modeling

- Everyone is watching. Everyone is a service role model. Your leaders, managers and frontline staff consistently provide superior service to customers and to each other. (We provide coaching and specific examples to help them 'walk the talk'.)

These '12 Building Blocks' are activities that every large organisation already does – but the key is to align your activity in these building blocks to enjoy greater results from the effort you are already investing. Building a superior service culture does not need to cost more money. In fact, a strong service culture tends to reduce costs as internal service improves.

As an example, many organisations accumulate measures and metrics to track sales, productivity and service performance over time. Such legacy measures can incentivise behaviour that is short term or relevant only to a specific department, but may be disconnected from producing a positive customer experience.

This is exacerbated if such metrics are linked to pay and promotion and thus encourage internally focused or 'siloed' behaviour.

In many organisations, customer surveys to measure 'satisfaction' have become entrenched and self-sustaining, generating mountains of data without a corresponding volume of

valuable actions. In other cases, surveys are little more than a mechanism to harness customers in the role of quality audit.

Elimination of such nonaligned metrics addresses this disconnection.

## The crucial role of leadership

Many CEOs have risen to the top as experts in their industries, not as experts in building a service culture. This often results in 'service improvement' being considered a frontline issue. This is a fundamental mistake.

The power of senior leadership to set the vision, reward success, remove roadblocks and role model correct behaviour cannot be delegated to others.

In fact, active and visible involvement by senior leaders in the organisation is essential to ensure the strategic building of a service culture is not perceived as tactical efforts at service improvement ('a service quality thing'), frontline skills upgrading ('customer service training'), enhancing customer experience ('another buzzword from the marketing department'), or even 'a culture thing' from Human Resources.

Building an uplifting service culture requires everyone to take responsibility, understand and play their roles with clarity and vigour – from the top down, and from the bottom up!



# How to build a better customer service culture in your business



**UP! Your Service** provides world class service education that is easily customized and proven effective across diverse industries, languages and cultures.

College courses are quickly deployed for managers and staff at all levels using video-based courseware and in-house Certified Course Leaders.

**UP! Your Service** combines service education with culture building support in twelve essential areas, providing effective tools, techniques and best practice case studies.

This integrated approach engages employees throughout the organization to build a superior service culture for sustainable competitive advantage.

**UP! Your Service** was founded by Ron Kaufman, the world's leading educator and motivator for uplifting customer service and superior service culture. Ron is the author of the bestselling "UP! Your Service" and "Lift Me UP!" book series.

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