



Service Sucks!

“Without a service strategy, how can you expect anything different?”

One of the most important reasons why companies fail at service is they don't have a service quality game plan. Ask any senior executive if there is a business plan or budget. Answer yes. Ask them if they have a marketing and sale plan. Answer is likely yes. Ask them if they have a technology strategy. Yes here too. Then ask them if they have a service strategy. They will try to answer yes. But if you pursue it, ask them to describe their customer philosophy, I guarantee the dead kipper look comes over their eyes.

They way they get around this is by saying they are customer focused or, even better, *customer centric*. Most don't know the difference between being internally oriented, customer sensitive, customer focused or customer centric. They are truly different postures and require very different behaviours at all levels within the company. The real question here is “what can you afford to be?” make no mistake about it. You can go broke with great service. The best answer is to understand what customers want, what they expect and what perceptions they have of your company.

Once you truly understand what they value, what they expect and what service levels they are willing to accept from your company you can then build a game plan. Without that, it's a crap shoot. That's why so much service we experience today sucks. It begins with the lack of customer input, followed rapidly by a myriad of activity that never touch customer's hot button.

A proper blueprint should answer this question: “What do you stand for when it comes to service quality?” We have seen companies do research and identify up to 99 things that need to be addressed by the front line people. People can't remember what they wore yesterday let alone 99 service attributes. We subscribe to a very simple construct. Len Berry, Parisuraman (Texas A&M) and Valarie Zeithaml (Duke) summarized it very well. There are only five key attributes to focus on: Reliability (keep your promises), Responsiveness (being on time and prompt), Assurance (conveying trust and confidence), Empathy (caring), Tangibles (product, documentation, appearance). Now isn't that easier to remember than 99 things? And with that framework, is it even possible to build a service quality strategy that everyone can understand and follow through on.

Defining what you want to stand for in service quality takes a bit of self evaluation. You have to know what you suck at. You have to be prepared to change processes, behaviours and, in some cases, people. You have to invest in training, equipment and technology. Many companies want to be customer centric but do not understand this is not the flavour of the month nor a short term proposition. Once entering the service arena, it's hard to get out with any kind of credibility. Staying in with credibility can be equally difficult.

A service blueprint is essential if all parts of the organization are to understand what is to be delivered and how. Service delivery is complex. Satisfying customers consistently is easier said than done. Not only do you need to understand customer needs according to the concepts mentioned earlier, you must develop strategies around certain principles that are important to customers. Strategies need to be developed around speed, accuracy, accessibility, flexibility, quality staff, and other important aspects your customers have readily identified.

Customer don't leave you because you are not on time once or twice or that their statements reflect mistakes once. But do it consistently and regularly and they will conclude you a unreliable, unresponsive and don't care about their business. Then they leave for another company who delivers up these attributes.

So then where is your game plan on all of these aspects? Nowhere. And your service *will suck!* Figuring it out isn't rocket science. It requires your leadership team to determine what they want to be renowned for in service. Has Wal-Mart figured it out? Has Neiman Marcus figured it out? Has Apple figured it out? Has the Four Seasons Hotel figured it out? They sure have. Now you don't have to be at it every minute. You have to have a plan to deliver good solid service most days, occasionally wow or delight your customers and, if you stub your toe, have a great recovery game plan. Empowering people as your only solution is weak. And we all know you really don't empower your people. You need a robust game plan built on service principles, delivered by well trained and well developed people who have a great service mentality. Add to that streamlined processes and tools so they can do it with the speed required and we have a better than average chance of success.



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STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS



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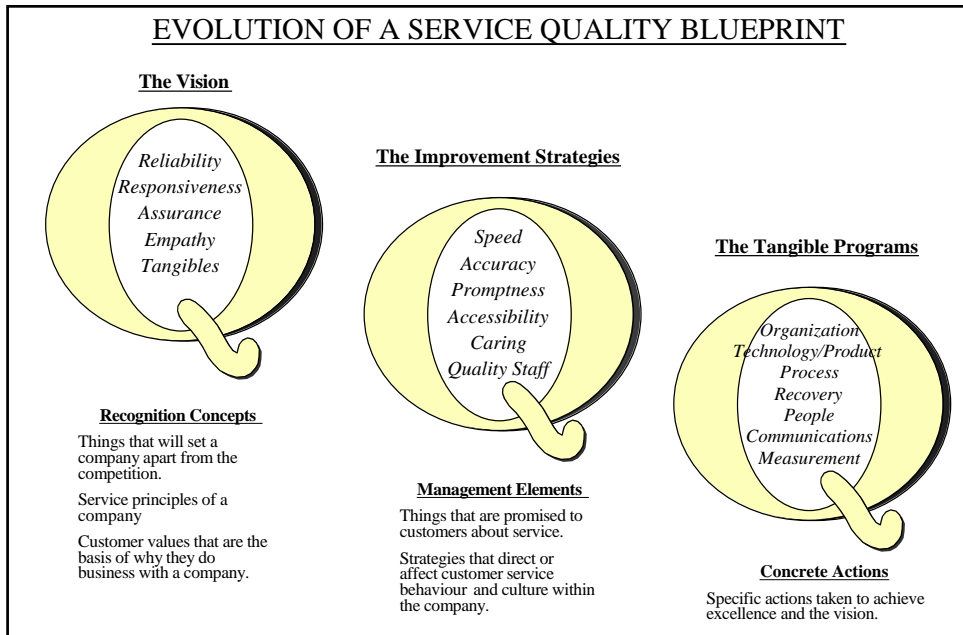
Remember, define what you want to stand for based on customer input and determine that it will give you a competitive edge.

Then build the blueprint with strategies your people can and will relate to and implement.

Finally, change processes, improve technology and find great people.

Leadership plays a vital role in direction, management needs to play the game by providing identifying strategies and front line people need to understand the service strategies and standards and recommend improvement activities.

The CEO and leadership must be committed to "true North" staying right on course and not quitting for some flavour of the month program.



About

The Strategic Planning Group

The Strategic Planning Group (T.S.P.G.) is a **full service consulting firm** that can provide organizations with a wide range of advice, business tools and solutions. At T.S.P.G. our focus is on helping our clients solve their complex issues to realize their ultimate potential, whether we are assisting in a particular functional area or helping to set the overall strategy for the organization. Our full service approach combined with our commitment to helping clients realize their ultimate potential, results in an efficient and effective approach, creating great value for our clients.

We want to be more than just consultants. For us to be successful in helping you we need to understand how you operate and what challenges you are currently facing. We want to help you achieve your goals and your ultimate business potential. To accomplish this we must be trusted and objective advisors to our clients by contributing our knowledge, experience and thinking in ways that make a positive impact.

We are growing rapidly and on the leading edge of thought leadership with a goal to add value to our clients.

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