



Foreword

Delivering great customer service is a challenging task to say the least. In technical trades it is a combination of doing the technical things right *and creating a positive customer experience*.

The technical part is the more clear-cut of the two. It's based on science, and managers and technicians can succeed through education, training, practice and disciplined delivery of the services. It is also more straightforward to measure and demonstrate to the customer in a tangible way (i.e. the problem was cost-effectively and responsively resolved—*or not*). Experience plays a big role here, so technicians generally improve technically over time, and also with longevity on any one account.

The more complex part of great customer service is creating a positive customer experience. This is because, like beauty, it is largely in the eye of the beholder. . . perception is reality. Each of us views a service interaction from a different perspective. A technician who engages in small talk might be seen by some as friendly and interesting and by others as wasting time. Getting the interaction “just right” can be tricky at best.

I believe as any service industry segment matures, the technical aspect of the service delivery becomes increasingly commoditized, making the importance of the “soft skills” aspect of the business key to any firm's success. In the early stages, the technical superiority of a firm's service delivery can be sold as a differentiator. Then the margins may support a substantial sales/account management function to market their capability and communicate with the customer. Eventually, the technical expertise becomes “table stakes”: the margins become tighter, thus making it ever more difficult to afford the dedicated sales/account management staff. This logically emphasizes the critical need to have the customer skills inherent in the team of technicians.

My career in the technical service industry has taught me that there are some indisputable truths which transcend individual perceptions when it comes to contributing to a positive customer experience. Good manners, exceptional responsiveness, genuine empathy and a willing smile come to mind. Also crucial is the power of effectively communicating—*especially translating technically complicated issues into easily understood concepts*. Overall, it's essential to demonstrate a sincere interest in acting in the best interests of the customer and providing proactive recommendations.

On this last point, there are many service technicians who do all this very well. They are highly valued and respected by their customers, as they provide real value to the relationship. Perceived as more than just polite, friendly faces, they are “partners” in helping the customer meet their challenges in business. Their employers also greatly appreciate them, because they generate profitable and often sustainable revenue, from the resulting long-term relationships. The challenge for service providers is to get all the technicians serving their customers in the same manner. History shows that this is not easy to do.

In *Beyond GREAT SERVICE*, Jim shows how forward-thinking service firms can integrate the customer focus and communication skills that exceptional technicians have, into something that is right at the core and heart of the service deliverable—*ultimately engaging the entire service team, and creating an outstanding and differentiated customer experience.*

This is not a quick-fix book with a laundry list of well-worn ideas for service managers. Jim clearly understands the psyche of the service technician and grasps the challenges that have caused many firms to struggle. This includes the significant obstacle of getting the technician team on board, while convincing them you're not trying to transform them into salespeople.

It's a fresh approach that will dramatically change how we define exceptional service and deliver a unique and valued customer experience. *Beyond GREAT SERVICE* offers up very practical approaches to ensure success, and should be required reading for every business owner and service manager.

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