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After 40 years focused solely on customer service I continue to devote my time and energy on helping businesses create a service culture. I have written hundreds of articles and seven bestselling books that are focused on Customer Service plus I just released Coaching for Success, my 22nd customer service program.

The point I try to get across to everyone is...you are in the *service business*. Most companies think they're in manufacturing and retail. It's a paradigm switch. Amazon is successful because it understands it's a customer service company that just happens to be the largest internet-based retailer in the world. Does it pay off to be focused solely on customer service? Amazon net sales increased 20% in 2014 to \$88.99 billion, compared with \$74.45 billion in 2013. Answer...yes it does... they celebrate excellent customer experiences.

Here are the six steps I tell everyone to creating a service culture. It works every time.

- **Understand you're in the service business.** Starbucks is successful because they understand they're a customer service company that just happens to sell great coffee.
- **Look at all the policies, procedures and systems you have in place that make life miserable for customers.** You could have the nicest people in the world but also stupid hours, stupid rules or stupid procedures that irritate customers. Stupid policies, procedures and systems that keep customers from coming back.
- **Have empowerment.** Every employee must be able to make fast and powerful decisions on the spot, and they better be in favor of the customer.
- **Be selective about whom you hire.** Service leaders hire one out of 50 applicants, sometimes one out of 100, and they're very careful. You have to look for the cream, the A players, instead of bringing on B and C players.
- **Educate and train the whole staff on the art of customer service with something new and fresh every four to six months.** It doesn't matter if you have 100, 1,000 or 10,000 employees; you better have something new and fresh constantly in front of them so when they go to work they say, "Fantastic—I'm taking care of customers."
- **Measure the results financially so you know the impact customer service is making on revenue, on profit and on market share.** You have to track the numbers so you understand that it's worth the time and effort.

My methods shouldn't shock anyone—and it's likely that most successful businesses are doing some of these things already. But I think it's the commitment to following through on all six that establishes a great service culture.

Let me share with you the five critical elements necessary for excellent service:

First, you have to have speed. "How do you shrink the time by 90 percent?" Speed allows you to be different in the marketplace. It's not going from 10 hours to nine hours, its how do you do it within the next

few minutes. How do you take care of customers right while you are talking to them?

Second, it's important to empower employees. They've got to do whatever they've got to do, on the spot, so the customer walks out of the store, on the phone or away from the internet and they think they have gone to heaven.

Third, quality in whatever service or product you're selling is essential

Fourth is service. Quality service is highly intangible. If you asked 100 customers to define it there would be 100 different answers.

Finally, I stress the importance of using the customer's name, remembering the customer and making each customer feel special. Take for instance Apple. I always have a great experience because they combine technology, speed, quality and service. They dominate because they understand how Service Culture works and they always call every customer by name. It's part of their procedure, part of their culture.

After all these years I have not changed my focus. I am still devoted to customer service, I am still devoted to using all my energy to helping organizations and individuals become as successful as possible and it all starts with Customer Service.

"Make a commitment to service and I'll be there with you every step of the way".

John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru, he has written several books on customer service. He just released the 10th Edition of Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service. The Service Quality Institute (<http://www.customer-service.com>) has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

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