Let’s ditch CSI scores and measure staff satisfaction instead

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Let's ditch CSI scores and measure staff satisfaction instead

By Professor Jim Saker

It started about 15 years ago, when virtually every car manufacturer training programme suddenly started to show what was affectionately known as the 'fish' video.

The video featured the now famous Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle (if you are one of the more recent recruits to the industry and haven't seen it, there is a link on the right). The film told the story of how this small fish stall had transformed its performance and reputation by throwing fish around.

To a cynic such as myself, on first viewing I must confess I thought it was massively self-indulgent and over-hyped. However, having paid two visits to the fish stall, I have been won over - not necessarily by their retailing skills, but by the orientation that their fish-throwing process causes in the interaction between staff and customers.

Their four principles about customer service do not deal directly on the customer. Instead, they concentrate on the attitude and approach of the staff.

- The first principle is about 'play' - basically, staff should enjoy themselves.
- The second is about staff choosing their attitude at the start of the day.
- The third principle is encouraging staff to make the customer's day by doing something memorable.
- Finally, the aim is to 'be present' for the customer, implying that the staff should be fully engaged in any interaction with customers as opposed to simply treating it like a process.

Essentially, the basis of their philosophy is that by having a happy and satisfied staff, you are more likely to have happy and satisfied customers. Over the years, the fame of the fish stall has grown to such an extent that they now run seminars and workshops for corporate organisations.

How do employees influence customer satisfaction?
The influence of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction has received considerable attention in both academic marketing literature and in practice.

It has been argued that the behaviour of employees plays an important role in shaping customer perception of business interactions. The theory is that satisfied employees are likely to be more friendly, enthusiastic, attentive and empathetic toward customers than ones who are dissatisfied. This satisfaction could be down to remuneration, job status or simply boredom.

The concept of 'partner effects' recognises that a person can be verbally and non-verbally influenced by the characteristics of a counterpart, in this case the interaction of the staff member and the customer. Additionally, the 'contagion effect' explains how satisfied employees influence others around them to feel good.

It has been proven that employee job satisfaction is positively related to customers' perceptions of the service they are receiving.

Also in the academic literature, there is the notion that employees who have higher levels of job satisfaction also believe they are able to deliver better levels of service than those who are less motivated. Happy or satisfied employees are expected to be more inclined to share these positive emotions with customers. There have been a number of studies around the world to suggest it is almost a universal truth that satisfied employees are more likely to produce behaviours that lead to satisfied customers.

One additional aspect of this came in a study that we conducted into car salespeople, their personality, job satisfaction and the way they went about doing their work.

An interesting issue arose around the concept of 'organisational citizenship behaviour'. This is a person's voluntary commitment to an organisation that goes beyond their contractual tasks.

To put it bluntly, how far is an employee prepared to go beyond what would be expected of them in their normal job role? Would the employee act in the best interests of the organisation at the expense of their own benefit?

Is it time we measured employee satisfaction instead?
Positive organisational citizenship behaviour has been shown to have a major impact on organisational effectiveness. These types of behaviour are discretionary and are born out of a positive attitude to the organisation in which the person works.

So where should we invest our management time? We talk about raising customer satisfaction as if it were an independent variable. Customer satisfaction is driven by the behaviours and performance of the staff that customers encounter as part of their interaction with the organisation.

If those staff are satisfied, the customer is more likely to receive a level of service they are happy with. The question is whether we should start measuring employee satisfaction surveys and concentrate on keeping our staff satisfied instead.

You may even end up with a group of people that will go the 'extra mile' for the benefit of the organisation purely on their own initiative.

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