



A Publication on  
**Strategy,**  
**Innovation,**  
**Communication**  
and **Change**



TRANSF

**ORMERS**

## Managing Customer Experience

By Omagbitse Barrow

The most important goal of any business is to attract the right type of customers and to grow the income that you earn from your customers. This is the most sustainable way of ensuring that your business succeeds and thrives. This only happens when you create and sustain a culture of service excellence in your organization and requires you to be deliberate about meeting and exceeding the expectations of customers.

When I think about meeting customer expectations, I always remember two classic movies – “What Women Want” (Mel Gibson, 2000), and “What Men Want” (Taraji P Henson, 2019). My takeaway from both movies – if you figure out what customers want and give it to them, you will ensure that the cash machine never stops ringing.

So, what do customers want? Our experience with managing customer experience in our organizations and with supporting clients do the same suggest that customers want fantastic service all the time. However, fantastic service comes from a culture that understands the value of customer service, the expectations that customers have and an organization that has created an enabling environment for these expectations to be met.

### The Mindset of Fantastic Service

In getting people to get into the right mindset regarding service delivery, we often challenge them to answer the question – who pays your salary? It certainly isn't your boss or the board of directors, NO, it is your customers! Unfortunately, if you look at how much organizations deify the bosses and the directors over and above customers, you will admit that most organizations only pay lip service to service delivery. A simple example – check out the parking spaces allotted to customers at most

commercial organizations compared to the privileged parking given to senior managers and executives. Do I need to go on?

In addition, think about the cost of bad service, something we call the “Naira<sup>1</sup> Value of Bad Service”. The statistics show that about 70% of customers who receive bad service never complain and therefore never have the issue resolved, instead they stop using your service and go on to tell about 10-100 other people who in turn tell others. About 10% of those who are fed this negative publicity end up never using your service or product because of the bad “second-hand” information that they got.

Ultimately, organizations are losing up to 30% of their revenue each year to bad service and negative referrals. That’s a lot to lose and gain back if only you had a better system and culture for managing service.

Finally, when it comes to the mindset of service delivery – it isn’t rocket science. It’s about empathy – if you want to know the right way to treat your customers, just bring out your mirror and reflect on all the instances of great service you have received and all the instances of bad service too. Incorporate the good examples into your service charter in your organization and avoid the bad examples like a plague.

## **What does Fantastic Service Look Like?**

When employees deliver fantastic service each day, they essentially carry out the following simple actions. Firstly, they greet the customer in a warm and enthusiastic manner, using their names properly and reflecting cultural norms and nuances while greeting.

Then, they take time to ask questions and listen to understand the needs of the customer. This is followed by taking all the necessary actions to meet the customer’s needs.

The fourth step in this process to make the moment memorable – doing something special and thoughtful to create a wonderful memory that will linger for the customer. Then you must check the results to ensure that the customer is satisfied with the service you have provided. Finally, customer-centric employees leave the door open, by exploring future opportunities and referrals from the customer.

## **What Do Customers Want?**

To deliver fantastic service all the time, you must know what customers want, and like Mel Gibson and Taraji P Henson, this knowledge is going

to open the doors to customer “heaven”. Researchers at the Texas A & M University led by Leonard L Berry came up with an amazing framework that explains customer expectations using the mnemonic RATER.



All customers, in all industries, across all geographies and using all products and services expect five things – **R**eliability (promises made and delivered); **A**ssurance (competent and professional staff); **T**angibles (attractive and comfortable physical and virtual environment); **E**mpathy (personal connection and care); and **R**esponsiveness (speed and accuracy with dealing with complaints).

Your goal in managing customer experience is therefore to ensure that these expectations are met and surpassed at every customer touch point in your organization.

## How To Meet Customer Expectations?

Well, it's one thing to know what customers expect, but is another to deliver those expectations. It requires a deliberate focus on building the systems and culture that drive service excellence. To achieve this, we encourage organizations to pay attention what is called the Governing Forces of service delivery – there are five of them.

Firstly, a mastery of job skills – if employees are not good at their jobs, they cannot be reliable, provide assurance or be responsive to the needs of customers. They just can't!

Then, a mastery of communication skills – employees must know how to listen, analyze information, speak, and write properly to be able to empathize with customers, provide them reliable service and give them the assurance that you know what you are doing.

Thirdly, organizations need to have a shared vision and teamwork – this affects your ability to respond effectively to customers and provide the positive tangible experience that customers want. Then, organizations need to have disciplined systems and procedures. This affects everything – reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness.

Finally, employees must have a positive attitude without which there can be no reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, or responsiveness. The five governing forces ensure that the five RATER expectations are met. You must create the environment in terms of structure and culture for these five factors to be at play in your organization if you want to deliver fantastic service.

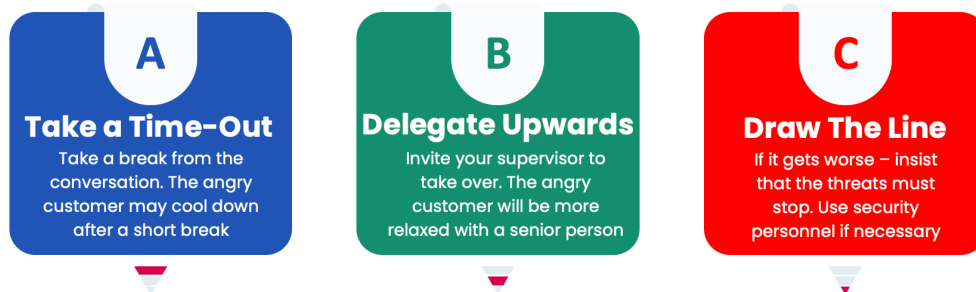
## **How To Manage Customer Complaints**

As we described earlier, complaints are an important part of service delivery. In fact, one of your goals is to ensure that you get as much feedback from unsatisfied customers as possible. Failing to get this feedback in the form of complaints is much more detrimental than any short-term ill feelings you may have because of the scathing feedback you may receive.

You must create a workable Complaint Management System that encourages customers to give feedback and challenges you and your colleagues to act on and respond to the feedback that you receive in a timely and responsible manner.

In addition, you must train your employees to receive complaints and to deal with irate customers who may unfortunately become very belligerent when dissatisfied with your service. We always recommend the three advanced techniques for handling irate customers, which you must use in this order.

# Handling Irate Customers



First you can take a time out – pause the conversation for a few minutes to go and look for more information to solve the customer’s problem. Usually, angry customers tend to become calm and reflective after a short break from the intense feedback and arguments. If this doesn’t work, then move to Plan B, delegate upwards – invite the customer to discuss their complaint with your supervisor. Getting the chance to complain to a higher-up boosts the ego of most angry customers. It makes them feel special, and they tend to be more accommodating once they feel they are being treated specially.

However, sometimes, this does not work. If the customer is still angry and even starts to threaten or act violently, you may go to Plan C, draw the line. This would usually be done by the senior colleague you have delegated to. It involves letting the customer know that the verbal and physical abuse will no longer be tolerated and may involve the use of the security personnel to show the client out of the office. This is a last recourse and is only necessary when you have exhausted the previous approaches and when the situation is still very heated.

Many scholars and practitioners in service delivery believe that service recovery is even more powerful than delivering fantastic service the first time. According to them getting it right the first time, all the time is not humanly possible, but failing forward and recovering from an initial setback is and should NEVER be missed.

**Service** delivery is at the heart of the success of any organization, and we have found that in societies and communities where service delivery is not a priority, the handful of organizations that focus on it are able to differentiate themselves and create significantly better income than their peers.

The journey to service excellence requires a mindset shift in your organization as well as the deployment of deliberate tools and frameworks to identify and meet the expectations of customers and create a culture of service excellence and service recovery.

Our team of organizational development experts at Learning Impact NG are available to provide you and your organization with the training, tools and systems required to deliver fantastic service to your prospects and customers, so that your cash machine will never stop ringing. Please do not hesitate to contact us on +234 805 195 3276.