2 Please hold, your call is important to us

A year from now don’t wish you had started today.

Anon

Steven Hamilton, Theatre Director at Hamleys:

As is quite common in a number of stores the escalators at Hamleys were designed to take the customer up one floor and then force the customer to walk around the floor to get the next escalator up to the next floor. The philosophy behind this is quite simple. It forces customers to walk around each floor with the possibility of an impulse buy. A great idea if you are coming from a perspective of just trying to sell things. Not so good if you are trying to build a great Customer Experience. Our customers told us they didn’t like this, especially during busy periods.

We took this issue to the board and we decided to change the way the escalator worked. This entailed literally taking the escalators out of the six-storey building into the street, turning them around and then refitting them again. A massive task in the heart of London’s shopping district. Over a period of two nights, we gained special permission from Westminster Council to close Regent Street to traffic. (The equivalent of closing Fifth Avenue in New York.) The escalators had to be taken out into the street, be turned around and brought back into the store and fitted the other way around. A huge effort, which also cost us a huge sum of money, but it was the right thing to do for our customers.

As you can imagine this was a massive task and one that must have cost a few dollars. All because customers did not like walking around the floors. This is customer-focused. I wonder how many boards and chief financial officers (CFOs) would have agreed to this expenditure?

This example is interesting for another reason. It is clear previous management thought it was a good idea to make customers walk around the floors, as is common with most large well-established stores. As the market changes, and the Customer Experience has increased in importance, Hamleys has decided to make a significant investment in changing the direction of the escalator. A simple task but one that bears testament to the change in its orientation towards the customer, from doing what was good...
for the organization to doing what is good for the customer, in other words, from Naïve to Natural™.

Another sign which bears testimony to how an organization is oriented is the way some organizations (the Naïve ones) place their customers on hold for five minutes and at the same time play a message that says:

*Please hold – your call is important to us.*

Translated, this really means you will need to wait for us, as we don’t want to employ enough people to answer your call; our organization’s time and resources are more important than yours.

A bit of a difference in attitude, a bit of a different orientation. Unfortunately, the reality is that the Customer Experience in most organizations today needs some attention. We will show the evidence to prove this as we progress through this chapter, where we will examine the current state of Customer Experiences across many organizations and assess where we are.

In association with the Marketing Forum, we conducted research with customers and employees to determine the current state of the Customer Experience across many industries. The results are very revealing. We have broken the Customer Experience into three stages: before, during, and after. Amazingly 51 percent of customers said they felt “apprehensive, nervous, worried, or mistrusting” as they entered a Customer Experience. Why is this the case? We believe that Naïve and Transactional organizations have “trained” customers to expect a problem. Let me tell you about a personal experience of mine:

*I was in New York recently giving a speech. The evening before I decided to go to the theater. I phoned a ticket agency call center. At the end of the call I asked the agent’s name as I was worried I would arrive at the “Will Call” window and they wouldn’t have my tickets. To my surprise, the agent replied, “I am agent 287.” “What, that’s a strange name,” I replied. “I am sorry, sir, we cannot give our names out.”*

Let’s take a couple of steps back. Why did I ask for the agent’s name? Organizations, primarily Naïve and Transactional, have trained consumers that if we don’t, when we have a problem and call them to sort it out, they invariably deny all knowledge of having dealt with us. Therefore we don’t trust them. They have taught us not to trust them. In my example above, this organization’s response was to impose a cost on itself and maintain a list of agents and their numbers, rather than fix the underlying root cause of the problem. The issue is simple:

*You get the customers you deserve.*