



Empathy: The Space Between Listening and Acting

I just got back from working with the Singapore Tourism Board and the Singapore Civil Service College addressing the issue of what makes for memorable tourist and citizen experiences. One of the many messages and tools I discussed during my recent visit seemed apropos for a quick hit in the newsletter - the topic of customer empathy.

Most of us have heard the tired distinction between sympathy and empathy - with sympathy being sorrow for another's plight and empathy being a willingness to step into the customer's emotional experience. But how do we help our people to be more empathetic, particularly, when faced with high volumes of customer transactions? Here's an exercise that addresses empathy as the space between listening and acting:

- Craft a few real-life problem scenarios for which your most common customer segments seek solutions. Add some details and back story to the scenarios. E.g, a single mother of two calls to complain about a delay in receiving a cabinet safety latch she ordered from your company or an 18 year old college student comes in to discuss renters insurance that you sell.
- Ask participants to speculate about at least two things each customer segment "might be feeling" in each scenario.

- Make it clear that participants are not to solve the problem for the customer, but simply hypothesize possible emotional reactions.
- Encourage the participants to share their hypotheses back to the customer. For example, "I imagine you might be feeling this or that."

In real-life, when service providers offer a couple of possible emotional hypotheses regarding a customer experience, the customer typically validates one of the hypotheses and travels down that path feeling that service provider "understood them." Sometimes the customer will say actually I am not feeling either of those things but this is what I am experiencing. Even when customers reject our hypotheses, it helps us speculate more accurately in the future. Like most things, if your people lack a talent for empathy, no amount of training will make them empathetic. If empathy lives in them, exercises like the one above can help that talent develop and shine.



Thank you for your support in helping me achieve recognition as one of the World's Top 30 Customer Service Professionals for 2014!

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The Best of the Blog:

Segment Your Service Experiences!

Customers aren't always right and they certainly aren't equal, but...customers are always paying the bills!

I am struck by two groups of business leaders - those who treat customers as an after thought to profits or products and those who treat every customer equally. I have always ascribed to Peter Drucker's adage that we are not in business to create a profit but rather to "create a customer." It is through customers that profits come! That said,

profits come differently from varied customer segments. [Read more.](#)



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