

# Driving a Service Culture

If you want to position yourself as a service leader you need to launch 2005 with a process in place that will educate and train every employee to excel at customer service. Many organizations work on the assumption that employees have been previously trained to excel at customer service.

Too many organizations believe that telling employees in a January memo to love customers and take care of them will solve the problem.

***“Use new training materials every six months. Never put employees through the same program unless the previous one did not stick.”***

I just returned from snow skiing in Vail, Colorado. Skiing is great but difficult for beginning skiers. If we told you to go to the top of the mountain and just ski down, most would panic, break out in a sweat and never be willing to ski down. Virtually all skiers take lessons before they go skiing. The lessons will take several days. Really great skiers take lessons every year.

Skiing is a little like customer service. Not overly complicated. Eventually you get better and better. No one in their right mind would consider snow skiing in Vail without ski lessons. How many would consider hiring an employee without customer service training?

Donald Trump in his book, *Trump, Think Like a Billionaire*, writes: “Gary Stephan, the golf pro at the Trump National Golf Club in Briarcliff Manor, New York, feels that good golfers need to put in two to three hours per

week of practice, whether it's on the putting green, or playing rounds, or at the driving range. Serious golfers looking to improve their game should also devote an hour a week to instruction. Golf, like everything else in life, requires dedication.”

If you want great customer service you should provide the following:

1. All new employees should be trained on the art of customer service before they start or within the first week.
2. All present employees need to be trained with a NEW customer service training program at least every six months.
3. Ideally all employees should go through 40 hours of training, on customer service, every year.
4. Use new training materials every six months. Never put employees through the same program unless the previous one did not stick.
5. Use training programs that are built around experiential learning. Ideally, 80 percent of the time.
6. Use tools that are fun and exciting, to hold attention.
7. Build people from within. Help them believe in themselves. Expand their self image and self concept.
8. Work on the basics and fundamentals. Execution of the basics is the hardest thing to master and the most critical to use.

I have a Vail Peaks ski pass that is electronically scanned. My card has my photo and name. The employees at Vail are incredibly good at service. About 90% of the time employees would say, after scanning, thanks for skiing Vail today John, or thanks John. They always used my name. This is what I call the fundamentals.

How often is an employee trained to read your name and use it? When is the last time you were at your bank and the employee recognized you and called you by your name? How hard is it to read a deposit slip or check? A customer's name is the most precious thing they have.

Some of you are thinking why spend good money and valuable time training people on the basics. Simple things like recognizing customers and calling them by name. An organization that is mastering the service culture will have highly trained people who love customers. Service leaders have flawless execution.