

The Oceanaire: A Customer Service Role Model

How many times have you seen an advertisement or heard a commercial in which a company proclaims: Our service is unparalleled! Service with a smile! Then, when you do business with that company, that service and those smiles are nowhere to be found.

That's not the case with the folks who run the Oceanaire Seafood Room in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Their web site proclaims, "Where exceptional seafood meets exceptional service." And that's not just lip service; they deliver what they promise. They know the power of customer service in instilling customer loyalty, boosting word-of-mouth advertising, and adding to the restaurant's bottom line.

Let me give you an example of the Oceanaire's service and its impact on customers. Pat and her husband Bob decided to celebrate their anniversary by dining at the Oceanaire Seafood Room. When Pat called to make a reservation, the conversation went like this:

"Is this a special occasion?"

"Yes, it's our anniversary."

"How many years have you been married?"

"Twenty-eight."

"That's wonderful. Does your husband go by Robert or Bob?"

"Bob."

"Thank you. We'll see you at 7:00 Saturday evening."

When Pat and Bob entered the Oceanaire the following Saturday, the hostess greeted them by name, adding, "Happy Anniversary." After they were seated, the couple was pleasantly surprised to see that, printed at the top of each of their menus was this: *Happy 28th Anniversary, Pat and Bob.*

The rest of the evening was beyond their expectations—great food, superior service, and a wonderful ambiance. Even though the dinner took more out of their budget than they normally would spend on even a special dinner, they agreed that they would return and not wait for a special occasion to do so. They also told everyone and anyone who would listen—family, friends, and co-workers—about their wonderful experience at the Oceanaire.

The folks at the Oceanaire understand the importance of exceptional customer service. They understand that giving their customers more than they expect doesn't have to cost a lot—but the financial rewards are tremendous. They understand that word-of-mouth advertising not only is much less expensive than any advertising they

could pay for, it also is much more credible. When someone gives you a personal recommendation for a business, you're much more likely to believe them than you are any newspaper ad or TV commercial.

No matter what business you're in, you can earn the loyalty of current customers and attract new customers by providing service that is so exceptional it results in powerful word-of-mouth advertising. To do so, however, you must enlist the help of everyone in your organization. And that starts at the top. Management must make a commitment to customer service; they must develop a service strategy.

That strategy begins with hiring people who genuinely enjoy working with people and then training them to meet your service standards. You can bet the receptionist at the Oceanaire didn't just happen to ask Pat why she and her husband were making a reservation at the restaurant; she had been trained to do so. And the other employees followed up, which made the couple's dining experience a memorable one, one that they eagerly and enthusiastically shared with others.

At the core of a service strategy is the belief that no transaction is complete unless the service customers receive is sufficient enough to motivate them to return and do business with the organization again and again. The folks at the Oceanaire certainly accomplished that goal with Pat and Bob.

What kind of service are you providing your customers that will earn their praise—and their loyalty? **RO**

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