

**“It’s interesting that in today’s multinational companies, as large as some of them are, they still need to take care of their customers on a daily basis.”**

– Jeff Gee

➤ **For a company, who matters the most—the customers or the consumers? Can you illustrate, drawing from your research and consulting insights, this distinction?**

In a way we are all consumers. We all consume goods, merchandise, and food and on an energetic level we even consume energy from others. We love to be around people who lift us up and make us feel great, and we do not like to be around people who are unhappy—I sometimes refer to these kind of people as energy suckers. And as far as customers go—we are also all customers. In my classes on Super Service I say, “Everyone Who is Not Me is My Customer!” When human beings work at this higher level of being amazing, things take place. People feel better about themselves, where they work, their colleagues, friends and family. When we treat everyone as a customer a whole new world of opportunity opens up. We stop giving lip service to customers and actually want to help and make a difference.

➤ **Every marketing guru talks of customer loyalty. That’s fine though. What should be the roadmap for any company to build customer loyalty?**

The roadmap for a company is the same as it would be for an individual—it is to take responsibility for being the best that I can be. It is about walking the walk and talking the talk from top down and from bottom up. It’s no good if the CEO of a company is walking the walk and only his or her closest confidantes know about it. It’s also no good if the people on the front line are being amazing and all the other departments are not. When the roadmap is for each individual to take responsibility for being the best that they can be, customers feel that there is something wonderful happening with this company, and it is attractive to them. They want to stay, they want to remain close, and they want to be involved with the amazing energy. It’s like any road that you

travel—you want it to have great signposts, be well-kept and take you exactly where you want to go!

➤ **Are there any limits to this customer loyalty? In other words what are the costs of customer loyalty?**

There are no limits to customer loyalty and it doesn’t cost a penny! You see when people understand that to be of service actually creates a better life for themselves and others, they want to embrace that way of life. And when I talk about customers, remember “Everyone Who isn’t Me is My Customer” so that includes co-workers, family and friends as well as the actual outside customers. When you have customer loyalty, you can make a mistake and they are still willing to work with you. Obviously, you can’t keep making mistakes, and when you have a loyal customer, they will “cut you some slack”.

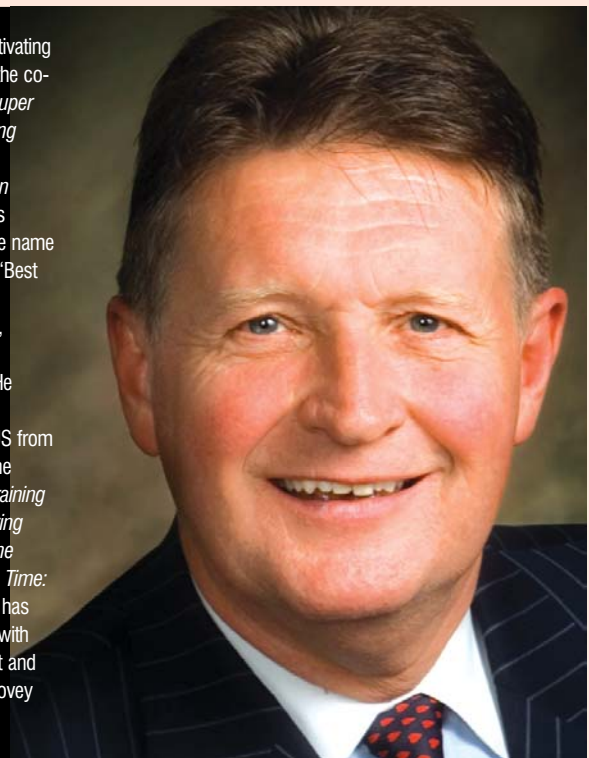
➤ **Is there any difference between customer equity and customer loyalty? Or is it a chicken and egg situation?**

According to Harvard Business School, “A 5% increase in customer loyalty can increase profitability by 25-80%. So, yes there is a definite equation between customer loyalty and customer equity. Another survey made by Technical Assistance Research says that “It also costs 5-7 times more to get a new customer than it does to keep the one you already have.”

➤ **Considering customer service as a value proposition, how do you build credentials (as regards customer service)? How should multinational companies look at it? Are there any powerful illustrations of having successfully managed this value proposition across countries?**

It’s interesting that in today’s multinational companies, as large as some of them are, they still need to take care of their customers on a daily basis. With today’s powerful communication tools, it’s just as easy to get good “buzz” as it is to get bad “buzz”. So no company can ever rest on its laurels and think, “ahhhh, we have great customer service credentials, now we can

Jeff Gee is one of the most captivating and humorous speakers. He is the co-author of an awakening book, *Super Service: Seven Keys to Delivering Great Customer Service, Even When You Don't Feel Like It! Even When They Don't Deserve It!* His remarkable program of the same name has been revered as one of the “Best Ever!” by such companies as Motorola, Computer Associates, Abbott Laboratories, Pepsi, MB Financial, CDW, and Siemens. He brought his successful training company, MJ Learning, to the US from England in 1983. He authored the books *The Customer Service Training Tool Kit: 60 Activities for Delivering Super Service to Customers*, *The Winner's Attitude*, and *Investing Time: Investing Time for Your Life*. He has co-authored *Pillars of Success* with Alexander Haig and Pat Summitt and *Mission Possible* with Steven Covey and Brian Tracy.



take it easy. I travel across the globe delivering customer service to companies such as Motorola, Computer Associates, Baxter Healthcare and many more, and every time, I am amazed at the willingness and effort that these companies and their employees put into customer service. What I notice is that most people want to be their best. They want to deliver the best products with the best service, and on their behalf, I always do my very best to teach people how to do that.

► **In your book *Super Service: Seven Keys to Delivering Great Customer Service ... Even When You Don't Feel Like It! ... Even When They Don't Deserve It!* you talked of seven keys to delivering great customer service. It reads more like an "insider-looking-out" approach as opposed to an "outsider-looking-in" approach. Therefore can you share as to the reason behind the logical sequencing of the seven keys?**

The first key to Super Service is about having the Right Attitude, and all the other keys stem from that. Everything begins with right attitude. If a person does not have that, it is impossible for him to have any of the other keys such as: Understand the Customer's Needs, Communicate Clearly, Reach Agreement, Check Understanding, Take Action or Build on Satisfaction. You may already know that your thoughts create your attitude which creates your actions and if people do not have the right attitude, their actions will not be right either. They may be smiling at the customer, saying the right words and looking as if they really want to help—yet without the right attitude, their words will be empty. As human beings we know when someone really wants to help or not. So it is about the insider looking out—when we as individuals have the right attitude, we can take care of problems and issues and be assured of the right outcome for all concerned.

► **In this age of customer-centric innovation/product development, what should be the customer service premise? What kinds of precautions need to be taken as regards the customer service?**

The only precaution that needs to be taken as regards customer service is to teach people how to be amazing with

customers. That's because even if a product is amazing—if the service does not meet expectations, sales will fall. People today have high expectations, and rightly so. Our job in customer service is to develop ourselves as human beings so that we grow as individuals, and as companies.

► **How does one manage irate customers?**

There are 10 steps to managing an irate customer and they begin with showing empathy. This does not mean saying, "I understand your situation." Because the customer may rightly say, "No you don't." Showing empathy means putting yourself in the customers' shoes. Imagine them as beloved family members—how would you manage them if you wanted to help them and be less distressed. Remember, the customers are not angry at you...they are in an angry situation. Their anger actually has nothing to do with you...and the following steps will help them to come back to a state of communication that you can handle.

1. Show empathy that you understand their situation.
2. Encourage venting to help them get rid of their anger.
3. Stay objective and don't take it personally.
4. Remain calm to the situation by remaining peaceful.
5. Listen attentively and show you are listening.
6. Take responsibility and show urgency.
7. Involve the customer in the solution.
8. Give added value.
9. Provide an action plan.
10. Involve your management.

► **It is generally an agreed fact that before any company looks out of its window for new customers, it should have developed an internal army of customers. What, according to you, is the substantiation behind this reasoning? What are the best ways to nurture internal customers?**

*US News & World Report* found that the following percentage of customers quit buying from companies because:

- ☀ Someone in the company dies—1%
- ☀ Make Other Friendships—3%
- ☀ Change Location—5%
- ☀ Go to Competition—9%
- ☀ Dissatisfied—14%
- ☀ Of Indifference by One Employee—68%
- ☀ It gets worse...

Research shows that out of 25 dissatisfied customers:

- Only one customer complains
- Twenty-four are dissatisfied but don't complain
- Six of the 24 non-complainers have "serious" problems
- The 24 non-complainers tell between 10 and 20 other people about their bad experiences
- *Therefore...* From just 25 customers nearly 250 - 500 potential customers learn about the bad service!

So the best way to nurture internal customers is to teach them how to be amazing individuals who take responsibility for their actions and feel empowered to live the kind of life they want to live. In the end result, happy employees make happy customers, both internal and external.

► **What are the latest insights on customer relationship management?**

If you've noticed, some companies now have voice recognition systems which ask you to "say" your account number and repeat the number to ensure the system has the correct information. So the latest CRM systems are trying to replicate the human customer service provider as much as possible. And of course, it's also about speed. Customers want fast answers even faster!

► **What new trends do you foresee in the next couple of decades on the customer service front?**

I would hope that we would put customer service in the hands of the customer. It would be a mix of both automation and human contact—and a mix that works for the customer. In other words, when a customer wants a quick automated answer without talking to a human being, then they should have that option. If on the other hand they want to talk to someone, they should be able to get through to a human being as quickly as possible without going through minutes and minutes of automated service. ☺

The interview was conducted by

Dr. Nagendra V Chowdary,

Consulting Editor, *Effective Executive*,  
Associate Dean, ICFAI Business School Case  
Development Center, Hyderabad.

Reference # 03M-2006-09-10-06