

CRAFTING

the

CUSTOMER

EXPERIENCE



PEOPLE

NOT LIKE *

YOU

How to DELIGHT AND ENGAGE
THE CUSTOMERS YOUR COMPETITORS
DON'T UNDERSTAND * * * * *



KELLY McDONALD

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CHAPTER 1

How Tweaking the Customer Experience Grows Your Business

You didn't pick up this book because you want to know how to provide terrific customer service. There are plenty of good books and articles on the subject, and they all cover the basic principles of being polite, efficient, and responsive to customers' needs. You picked up this book because you're smart enough to know that the *business climate out there is changing*. In fact, it's already changed. It's not easy to provide a level of customer service that resonates with all your customers anymore. It's more fragmented than that. People are not "one size fits all," and therefore, one sweeping customer service approach isn't going to cut it when it comes to satisfying—much less *delighting*—a diverse group of customers.

Providing a great experience to different kinds of people isn't just the right thing to do. It's the *strategic* thing to do. Crafting a customer experience that caters to people not like you will improve your business in five ways:

1. It will grow your business by bringing in *new customers*.
2. It will give you a *significant competitive edge*, since your competition is probably either ignoring diverse customer groups or, at best, underserving them.
3. It will *increase customer loyalty* and therefore *customer retention*.
4. It will help *differentiate* you from other businesses or similar enterprises.
5. It will give you a *greater understanding of different customer groups*, providing key insights into what people who are not like you want and what they respond to, which will generate even more creative ideas and unique ways to delight customers.

Any one of these five ways is reason enough to be reading this book. Business nowadays is tough and fiercely competitive, and no one can afford to overlook a customer group. But when you combine all five of

these ways to deliver an exceptional customer experience to people not like you, they add up to a truly unbeatable market position.

It doesn't matter what business you're in or what level you're at in an organization; if you work, you have customers. Even if you work internally at a company and don't interact with any of the company's customers directly, trust me—you still have customers. If you're an administrative assistant, your customer may be the team you work with. If you're in accounting, your customer is the entire company, because that's who benefits from sound accounting skills. If you work in a small office, your customer may be your boss. And if you work with clients or customers directly, then of course, you must deliver great customer service to keep them happy and retain them as customers.

We *ALL* have customers. If you work, you have customers.

This book will help you find creative ways to develop loyal customers by crafting specific experiences for major customer segments such as women, Latinos, African Americans, and different age/generational groups. Chances are, your competitors aren't paying attention to these groups, or not as much attention as they should be. If you can find an overlooked group and delight almost every member of that group, then you've found the next growth strategy for your business.

Providing a good customer experience is a pretty basic business concept, right? But that's not what this book is about. It's about how you can deliver an exceptional experience to *people* who are *not like you*. This can be difficult, because often our differences are subtle. That's why your competitors aren't developing customer service strategies for diverse markets: they don't see an obvious "hole" in the market for that. They simply don't recognize the need to do it. And that's precisely where your opportunity lies: by creating a customer experience that addresses a specific customer group's needs and wants, you can differentiate yourself from your competition and grow your business with new, incremental customers.

To figure out how to best serve someone not like you, you need insight. You need to address areas such as hiring and training. And

you need to expand your thinking to encompass the *entire experience*: what happens to or with a customer before, during, and after purchasing your product or service. Let me give you an example:

When you get a chip or crack in your automobile's windshield, you call an auto glass/windshield repair company. Almost all of these companies will come to your home or office to do the repair on-site. This provides a tremendous benefit to the customer, because it allows that person to keep doing what he or she needs and wants to do (working, for example) and saves that person time by eliminating the need to go anywhere. And it's also practical; many times, the windshield may be so damaged that it's not safe to drive the vehicle because the driver's visibility is impaired. Coming to your home or place of business is a wonderful *service* aspect of the product that these companies sell. Their *product* is auto glass repair, but they provide a valuable customer *service* by coming to you.

DIFFERENT CUSTOMERS CARE ABOUT DIFFERENT THINGS

Not all customers are the same. We don't all have the same priorities, concerns, or needs. Many women, for example, are uncomfortable having strangers come to their homes, particularly if that stranger is a man. I have several single female friends who *always* choose to meet vendors and repairmen at their offices or workplaces whenever possible, because they don't want a stranger to know that they live alone. But it's not always realistic to meet someone at your place of work. After all, if you need a plumber to fix your toilet, that plumber must come to your home.

Safelite Auto Glass crafted a customer service benefit that was clearly *developed for women*. Once an appointment is scheduled, they informally "introduce" the technician to the customer by e-mail and include a photo of the technician who will be doing the work; they also inform the customer what time the technician will arrive. Wow! Although this is a service that everyone can benefit from, it's clearly designed to put women's minds at ease. By knowing what the technician looks like and what time to expect him or her, clients' anxiety of having a "stranger" come to their homes is reduced. What a terrific service! It's so simple—but it shows how the company really

understands women and is working hard to be a woman's preferred provider of auto glass repair. They are providing a solution to a specific fear or anxiety that many women have: having a stranger come to their home. You know what else I like about this example? It costs so little but means so much. E-mailing a photo of the tech is a low-cost or no-cost step, but it gives the customer *priceless peace of mind*. It also tells that female customer that she is seen, appreciated, valued, and understood—and isn't that what we all want?

Every customer wants to feel special and important; we want the places we spend our money to welcome, appreciate, respect, and value us. But the customer experience needs to be more than that in today's business climate; it must also be more nuanced, refined, and unique—to move from “mass” to “targeted.” This doesn't mean that each and every customer needs to have a customized experience. It means that brands must make their services more targeted and tailored to specific customer *groups*. You can provide various types of customer service—or service in different *ways*—to diverse groups of people. By doing so, you let that customer group know that you recognize them and their specific needs, wants, hopes, or fears. You show that you are responding to those with specialized service offerings that are right for them. And those customers and prospects will feel so valued that they'll reward you with even more of their business.

This book will show you how to create customer service experiences that are right for people *not like you*—and will show that you don't have to break the bank to do it. You'll learn how to design distinctive types of experiences that will surprise and delight your customers and prospects and keep them coming back to you for more. It's a proven fact that customer retention is far less costly than acquiring new customers. So why not focus on giving each and every customer an experience that delights them, engages them, and exceeds their expectations? Doing so will turn those happy customers into your greatest advocates. They become ambassadors for your brand, product, or service, spreading referrals and goodwill about you to their networks of family, friends, and associates. Why wouldn't you want to put that no-cost power to work for you? Why wouldn't you want to give diverse groups the customer service *they* want and need?

WHY I DISLIKE THE “D” WORD

This is a good place for me to define what I mean by “diverse” customers. I’m not a big fan of the word *diversity* these days, for two reasons: First, I think many people have what I call diversity fatigue. They’re tired of hearing about how important diversity is. They’ve heard the “diversity lecture” at work for years now and are burned out on it. They see or hear the word and automatically tune out. It’s not that they don’t respect different cultures, races, ethnicities, and norms; it’s just that there has been so much focus on diversity that people are tired of the subject, even though it’s an important one.

The second reason I tend to shy away from using the word *diversity* is that, in my experience, most people automatically default to thinking of diversity in terms of racial and ethnic differences. And although that’s very important and we’ll tackle customer service for some key racial and ethnic groups in this book, I don’t think that even begins to cover the breadth of meaning of the word *diversity*.

THE DEFINITION OF “PEOPLE NOT LIKE YOU”

I define *diversity* as “any way that I can be different from you.” For example, if you have kids and I don’t, we’re likely to have different priorities and face different pressures. Your entire focus shifts when you become a parent, because it has to. Parents think about and evaluate everything differently from people who aren’t parents. But that difference has nothing to do with race, ethnicity, age, or even gender; it simply has to do with whether or not you have children.

Someone who lives in a major metropolitan area is different from someone who lives in a small, rural community. Imagine the customer service implications of each scenario. The city dweller may appreciate speed and efficiency above all else. Super busy and rushed all the time, the city dweller has to spend valuable time fighting traffic just to get where he or she wants to go and has to fight crowds everywhere. If you were a merchant catering to this customer, perhaps the greatest customer service experience you could provide would be one that *saves time and reduces hassles*.

But the rural customer may have none of those same issues. He or she may enjoy, above all else, the friendly, personal interaction received from someone considered to be a *neighbor*. A rural customer may perceive a merchant who provides a fast, efficient, no-nonsense experience as uncaring or aloof. On the other hand, that person will see a merchant who greets the customer by name, asks about his or her family, and spends time chatting about the local weather or football game as friendly, a local fixture, and someone who can be depended on. The merchant makes it clear that he or she isn't too busy to spend a few minutes talking. In this example, *diversity* can encompass lifestyle and *how* people want to be serviced. Again, this example has nothing to do with race or ethnicity; it has to do with the attributes of city living versus rural living.

Of course, you already know all this. You picked up this book because the title promised you'd learn about providing customer service to people *not* like you. Whoever you are, wherever you live, and even *however* you live, there are lots of people who are very different from you. As a businessperson and a professional, you know that the time has come to figure out how to cater to all of your customers'—and potential customers'—needs and desires. Although marketing will bring customers to your door, it can't guarantee that they'll buy anything. You make the sale when a customer *experiences* what you have to offer.

NOT CUSTOMER SERVICE, BUT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Make no mistake; the customer experience doesn't simply entail what customers go through when they buy something. It also encompasses what happens before, during, and after that purchase—every aspect of doing business with you, from your hours of operation to convenience features to whether your customers can reach you by e-mail, phone, text or in person. It's the sense of *hospitality* that people feel when they are doing business with you. And it is a truly holistic experience. It's a 360-degree proposition, including what happens *after* the people become your customers. Customers' impressions of you and your product or service depends on the total experience. The experience is what they'll remember, because it's about how you

made them feel. We have all heard stories about people who wanted to buy something so much that they were completely sold on the product before they went about acquiring it. But then they experienced something awful or maybe just something that let them down and disappointed them, and *that's* what they remember. It's what they talk about and share with others.

A 60-something friend of mine recently switched over from an Android phone to an iPhone. My friend couldn't wait to get his new iPhone; he was completely and totally sold on the product before he bought it. But he had a terrible experience when he went to get it. No one in the store even acknowledged his presence for nearly half an hour. All of the associates in the store were in their 20s and ignored him. The store wasn't particularly busy, but the younger employees didn't greet him or offer any help. Perhaps they assumed that if he needed help, he'd ask for it. My friend isn't particularly "hip" or stylish or tech-savvy, and perhaps they ignored him for those reasons, too. Who knows? But the fact is, my friend felt alienated and uncomfortable, not welcomed and appreciated. He chalked it up to his age and the four decades of age difference between him and the store associates. He still purchased the phone and he loves it, but he tells *everyone* about how awful his experience at that particular store was—because despite the fact that he likes the product, the *experience* is what he remembers.

Consider as well that the magic was in the product in this example. It could have been sold from a vending machine and my friend still would have bought it. But how many products are that special? How many are the "only one that will do?" Nowadays, not that many. We have entered an era where products are becoming increasingly alike and more widely available, and with more standardized pricing. This makes it even harder to differentiate yourself, your business, or your product or service, because there are so many others that are similar. That's the bad news.

The good news is that what will set you apart from the sea of sameness is providing a great customer experience—and what's great about *that* is that it doesn't have to cost a fortune. You just have to really get to know and understand your customers, their needs, and their desires and figure out how to deliver service in the way that *they* want, that is, in a manner that's important to *them*. It's not about

what you want. It's about what *they* want. And if "they" are different from "you," then this book will be the guide to showing you how to deliver a great customer experience to people not like you. And in so doing, you'll take business away from your competitors who don't take the time to learn about different customers.

Some even better news is that there are real, tangible, measurable business benefits to providing a great customer experience to diverse customer groups. Here are the top three benefits to your business:

1. **Sales. Sales. Sales.** I make you this promise: if you craft an exceptional customer service experience for different types of people not like you, your business will grow. You will have more sales and profit. It's guaranteed to work, because people spend money on what they value. And a key part of their values is how you make them feel, how you respond to *their* needs and wants, and how you serve them and treat them. So if you deliver an A+ experience on each of those points, you will close more sales, sell more products, retain more customers, foster greater loyalty, and generate referrals. I promise you outstanding sales results. Here's proof:

I am friends with Ron Schwartz, the dealer principal at Cowboy Toyota in Dallas, Texas. Ron has always been focused on providing customers with a phenomenal experience—and he has always been successful because of that. Cowboy Toyota is located in a very diverse part of Dallas, with a large Hispanic population that lives within miles of the dealership. Yet just 5 percent of their sales were to Hispanic customers when Ron bought the dealership six years ago. He immediately recognized this opportunity to grow business and better serve the local community. But he knew that he first had to create a customer experience that would really "put the welcome mat out" for Hispanic car and truck shoppers.

To do so, Ron hired bilingual associates for *every* part of the dealership, not just sales. After all, he reasoned, if you prefer to speak Spanish when you buy your new car, why wouldn't you also prefer to speak Spanish when you bring the vehicle in for an oil change? Ron added bilingual associates in every department, kept Spanish brochures on hand for every vehicle, expanded their business hours to better serve Hispanics who work late

hours and couldn't come in before 8 PM, and added bilingual signage throughout the dealership. He's selling the same products to Hispanic customers as he is to non-Hispanic customers. But his efforts let his Hispanic car and truck shoppers know that they are in the right place and that Cowboy Toyota wants to earn—and *values*—their business. And earn it, he does. Today, 35 percent of the sales at Cowboy Toyota are to Hispanic customers. And my friend Ron says that he can't imagine where his business would be without that 35 percent. By simply putting the welcome mat out and crafting a great customer experience for customers not like him, Ron has grown his Hispanic clientele from 5 percent to 35 percent in just a few years.

2. **Demonstrating corporate responsibility.** Companies were once simply expected to make and sell quality products and services that were safe and competitively priced. That was a winning formula in business for a long time. Although you still have to deliver all of that today, you and your business are expected to be good corporate citizens, too. *Corporate responsibility* means being a responsible member of your industry and, of course, your local community. You must lead by example and “do the right thing.” You must set the standards and then uphold them. You must be accountable for your actions, and those actions must be *sincere*. In other words, you can't claim to support or market to diverse customer groups and then fail to serve them. You must be consistent in your value statements and your actions. You can't, for example, market to Hispanics and then not provide services that they're likely to value highly, such as bilingual personnel or extended hours or a family-friendly shopping and purchasing environment. As a business, you have a corporate responsibility to not just talk the talk, but also walk the walk. By creating customer experiences that clearly show you value all customers, not just those who are like you, you tangibly demonstrate your corporate values and that you take your responsibilities as a member of the local corporate community to heart.
3. **Great customer experiences set you apart from your competition.** And when a potential prospect is researching and comparing you and your competitors online, a key factor in deciding to do business with you may be how you work with diverse customer

groups. The availability of information today has profoundly—and permanently—changed the business game. Nothing is hidden anymore. We all have access to pretty much everything we might want to know about. And today, customers want to know about *who you are*. They can and will check you out and judge you based on what they find. And they can learn many things about you, aside from your products and services, that will shape their impression of you and either turn them on or turn them off. Do you hire a diverse team of associates? Do your executive ranks reflect that diversity, or are you just paying lip service while the company is run solely by older white males? Do you make an effort to be green and take care of the environment? Do you donate your old computers to a local school or nonprofit organization? Do you give back to the community by volunteering for the occasional highway cleanup? These are all things that people can and will discover about you. And ultimately, each of us wants to do business with the “good guys.” We feel good about ourselves when we make purchases that reflect our own values. So the more you cater to diverse customer groups and what they care about, the more connected to you those customer groups will feel. And this is a powerful weapon in your arsenal when battling tough business competition.

The best part of crafting a customer experience for people not like you is that you can control it. As a businessperson, there are a lot of things beyond your control that may affect you. You can’t control the economy. You can’t control the stock market. You may not have any real control over the cost of goods and labor. But customer service is the one thing that is *100 percent in your control at all times*. The variable in the customer sales equation that matters most of all is the one that you can control. Isn’t that great?

You can’t control the economy, the stock market, or even the cost of goods and labor, but you control the customer experience at all times.

It's also a challenging task to hire, train, and staff with the kind of people who will deliver a great customer experience. But it's a challenge you must tackle, because at the end of the day, *people* craft the experience your customers receive. And you, as a businessperson, must lead and guide your staff in recognizing that diverse customer segments are good for business. This book will help you lead your staff in the direction of diversity by teaching specific tactics and approaches that will provide you with a solid platform for providing the best customer experience for people not like you.

This book is not focused on the basics of good customer service. There are plenty of other resources out there on that topic, and I am assuming that you already know those fundamental things. This book is for the businessperson who is smart and forward-thinking enough to recognize that customers are changing; they're becoming less homogeneous and more individualistic and distinctive. This book will give you a simple, effective road map for how to take care of the customers you have, appeal to the ones you don't have, and delight and engage *all* of them. It's what you need now, and it will strengthen your business. So let's get started.