

## ELEMENTS OF A BEAUTIFUL WORK CULTURE: **SERVICE**

It's been estimated that customer service is a \$350 billion industry – yet great service is ever more elusive. It seems the more we try to wow our customers and clients, the more demanding they become.

As an extensive traveler for work and pleasure, I've noticed how the service landscape has changed, thanks to immediate feedback apps like Yelp and TripAdvisor, and the travel industry's active solicitation of positive reviews.

Our restaurant waiter in Playa del Carmen hands us a card with a link where we can offer positive comments. A TripAdvisor sticker hangs in the window of my favorite linen shop in Ireland.

Chip Bell, my favorite customer service expert ([www.chipbell.com](http://www.chipbell.com)) is a wonderfully informative resource on innovative customer service, having authored many books and talks on the subject. Chip suggests our customers now want to be *surprised*, and that if we want to continue to delight them we can no longer rely on the old, dry principles of consistency and productization in our relationships with those who buy our services.

The factors that made our business processes or products Six Sigma-worthy or LEAN unfortunately make them un-surprising. Chip says we must give our employees freedom to create innovative new “sprinkles” to the transactional experience.

When crafting your Beautiful Culture, consider the following suggestions for helping your team deliver *surprising service*:

- **Empathy** – The best, and rarest, foundation for all customer service is an ability to feel their needs and actualize our empathy. It's not just standing in the shoes of the tired traveler or the harried professional – it's noticing the emotions and feelings that accompany the customer's potential purchase. True empathy has to be cultivated. It cannot be simply read from a script. “So sorry,” the representative says mechanically on the phone from far away, and it's obvious they aren't sorry at all, because we can tell from their voice that they're feeding us what's written on the page before them. The intention is fine, but the genuineness is missing.

- **Anticipation** – Can you anticipate what your customers or clients are needing and wanting? Can you pay close attention, so you can offer them something unique? The VIP Housekeeping Team at the Ritz Carlton in Naples, Florida take careful notes of the specific preferences of their returning guests – a special pillow, a favorite scent. The concierge at the Palace Hotel in NYC suggests a spa visit or house seats to a show, rather than waiting to be asked.
- **Connection** – It really is all about relationships. If you were hoping to have a relationship with someone you cared about, how would you treat them? How would you be connected? You definitely wouldn't, I'm guessing, chase them down with a fragrance spritz as they stroll to the elevator. And you would not push them to a purchase. You *would* listen closely, ask questions and make sincere recommendations. You would, by definition, *relate*.

Here in County Limerick I'm visiting the Echo Lodge and Mustard Seed Restaurant for the fifth time in two years. I typically stay for just one or two nights, between trips to my workshops in County Kerry or County Louth. Yet no matter how long it's been, they remember me in lovely ways. They know my favorite beverage. They remember the sites I visited last time I was here. They acknowledge the friends I've sent to enjoy their gorgeous rooms and delectable food. My most favorite thing this time was a book that was personally selected from the Echo Lodge library and placed on my bedside table. Yesterday it was *Reading Women*, a collection of paintings of women reading. Now *that's* a lovely, surprising gesture for a writer guest who drives out of her way to come here, and who sends her friends and is happy to return again and again. **RO**

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