

The Secret to Providing Exceptional Customer Service

Have you ever stayed at a Ritz Carlton Hotel? Bought a pair of shoes, or returned them at [Zappos](#)? These two companies immediately come to mind when you think about exceptional customer service. While the two companies couldn't appear to be more different, when you drill down, they are very much alike in their core values and business and leadership principles.



Providing exceptional service begins with understanding the customer. In case you haven't noticed, the needs of the customer have changed a lot in the past few years, and will continue to evolve. Creating an exceptional customer experience doesn't mean you have to be twice as good as your competitor, just be a little better. That's easy if you have the right culture in place.

So, let's talk about culture... to me it is the difference between having to do your job versus wanting to. It is about selecting rather than hiring, training and empowering people to do what they do best. It is about recognizing achievements, establishing and monitoring goals, holding people accountable. And not forgetting to celebrate successes.

Both of the companies I mention above use similar words and phrases when describing their core values. WOW, embrace and drive change, trust, communication, passion, empathy and humility come to mind. As do family spirit, fostering relationships, determination, empowerment.

While much time and energy is spent on being and providing the best, the end goal that remains first and foremost with both companies is driving revenue for greater profitability. It is always about the numbers. As it should be.

So it was with great anticipation that I visited the corporate headquarters of Zappos last week in Las Vegas. I couldn't wait to find out what the secret was!

It all started with an immediate e-mail response to our request for a tour. Andrea from Zappos confirmed almost immediately and arranged for my party that included Marc and Brian from [1000 Watt Consulting](#) (consultants to BHGRE) to be picked up at my hotel and taken to their corporate facility. Andrea provide her cell phone in case there was a problem and followed up with repeated emails and calls as we got closer and closer to our arrival.

A branded van arrived five minutes early manned by Zack, our delightful and knowledgeable driver. The experience began before we even arrived at the building.

The receptionist was expecting us – she addressed us by name, our badges had been printed. There was a big book case in the lobby with multiple copies of all the business best sellers. A sign said... “help yourself – as long as you read it”... I did. Jerry, Zappos’ self appointed Mayor, arrived to conduct the tour. He is obviously retired from a previous profession and is now having the time of his life.

And so the tour began.

Imagine a huge call center, rows of rows of cubes, multiple computer screens, headsets. And then imagine it looking like nothing you have ever seen before. Every workstation was decorated, with creativity having no boundaries. Every wall was covered with awards, staff photos, signs, skateboards, and numbers. What struck me most were the numbers, biggest sales day ever, least amount of time to answer and successfully complete a call, revenue growth year over year. All in plain sight for every employee to see. As well as every onlooker who tours through. These are proudly displayed and acknowledged. Every minute of every day.

As Jerry artfully toured us through two buildings, staff applauded us, sang for us, danced for us, took our photos as we took theirs and just seemed honestly happy. They also seemed proud. We saw adults with batman capes, Goth hairstyles and everything in between. We witnessed firsthand people working very hard yet still having what appeared to be fun. Go figure...

CEO [Tony Hsieh](#) sits right out in the call center, as does COO [Alfred Lin](#). Their workstations are decorated to look like a jungle. The only person who has an office is [Dr. Vik](#). He is the Zappos in-house coach, modern day medicine man and shoulder to cry on . With free food offered in the kitchen, the empowerment to express yourself, and knowing you are part of arguably the coolest company in existence today, it didn’t appear as though anyone was in need of any coaching. Except maybe me! But occasionally we all need a hug. And Dr Vik is happy to oblige.

As our tour concluded, we received a bag of stuff including a copy of the Zappos culture book and a Zappos daily planner (they seem to have an interesting balance between high tech and traditional). Then out of nowhere, and right on time, Zack appeared and drove us back to the hotel.

Flawlessly executed. A day to remember.

So, you are probably wondering what the secret is, the secret to providing exceptional customer service. As it turns out, there is no secret. We all know how to provide exceptional service. It’s just that some of us are on the team that chooses to do it, and others are on the team that has decided not to.