

## How to Separate Yourself From Your Competition

Live by the mantra, “If you want things that no one else has, you must be willing to do things that no one else is willing to do.” I have leaders in organizations tell me that they don’t want to serve coffee in the lobby because their carpets might get dirty from spilled coffee. They don’t want water coolers in the lobby because children might play with it and get water on the floor. They don’t want cookies in the lobby because of cookie crumbs on the floor and some people take too many of them. They don’t want popcorn in the lobby because it makes too much of a mess and they have to vacuum it up. They don’t want candy dishes in the lobby because people leave their wrappers lying around, which creates a mess. They don’t want to stand and greet the customers because it’s too tiring on busy days. And they don’t want to use a customer’s name because some names are too difficult to pronounce.

Organizations spend so much time trying to think about why they can’t do things. I wish they would spend more time thinking about what they *can* do, because if exceeding customer expectations or having a service culture was easy, then everybody would be doing it. Creating service cultures is not fast, is not easy, and is not always convenient, but it is done every single day by organizations that are committed to the process and understand that anything less is not an option.

One of my favorite businesses is Les Schwab Tire Centers. They are based in Prineville, Oregon, and have over four hundred locations on the West Coast. Their employees will run out to the parking lot to greet you and then walk you into the showroom. Now, do you think that was a popular decision with their employees when they heard about it? Heck no! They offer fresh popcorn and coffee all day long, and do you think that is convenient for the employees? No! They offer free flat tire repair to everyone, even if you are not a customer. That takes lots of time out of their day and is probably not convenient for their employees. But those are the reasons they dominate the business in almost every town they are in. That is what is required today if you want to stand out from your competition.

The rewards are too great to abandon the journey to a service culture. If what you are doing today is not getting you there, then you need to readjust and go at it again. As you have probably heard, the definition of insanity is to continue to do what you are doing today but expect better results tomorrow. Creating a service culture has so many benefits. You end up with employees who actually love their job and they enjoy where they work. You also have customers who love to do business with you and they tell everybody about you, which also makes them look good as well. A service culture is not just about the external customer, it’s about the internal customer as well because employees serve each other in many ways.