

Change Begins at the Top

Statistically we have been able to prove that customer service training alone will not stick if leadership has not undergone specialized training on how to lead people in a service culture.

Back in 1991 when I owned a company called Genesis Group, we performed “mystery shopping” as one of our services. We began working with a very large nationwide bank. They had us perform what is called a “baseline mystery shop” (sometimes it’s called a “baseline secret shop”). They wanted to find out how productive their employees were at the time and what level of service they are offering before any training occurs. Then they had us go out immediately afterward and do customer service and sales training.

Within thirty days after the training was complete we went out and mystery shopped again to find out how effective the training was, and it was pretty impressive. They averaged a 100 percent increase in overall employee productivity. We were all just thrilled that the training seemed to have been effective. One month after that, we mystery shopped again and got an additional 5 percent increase. The month after that we shopped again and got a further 3 percent increase. Then all of a sudden, at about the fourth month, we saw stagnation. The employee’s productivity and increased level of performance just stopped.

The next month (the fifth month), productivity scores actually decreased for a few consecutive months thereafter in small increments. Even though they didn’t revert back to their original old scores, they still had deterioration that we could not understand. This happened with every single customer for almost a two-year period. So we performed employee surveys to try to figure out why this was happening. The employees reported that the customers were not very good at responding when they did something new. As an example, when employees used the customer’s name, the customer did not show any immediate response or signs of gratification. Also, the supervisors were not patting the employees on the back or giving them any praise or recognition for their behavior change. Therefore, the employees just reverted back to their old behaviors because it seemed that no one cared.

Immediately after that employee feedback, I developed a training seminar titled “Outstanding Leadership in a Service Culture.” The entire design of that training was focused on how leaders can change their behavior just slightly in order to dramatically impact the people they lead.

All of our new clients went through almost the same process as previous clients, starting with the baseline mystery shop. However, this time, before we did the

sales and customer service training, we did the new leadership training first. We saw the same immediate increase in scores as before, which was great. Thirty days later we saw another small increase in the mystery shop scores, sixty days a little bit more, and ninety days a little more. The wonderful thing is that we were able to sustain that growth for about twelve to eighteen months before we saw any stagnation and it was pretty rare to see deterioration.

What we learned is that the leader plays a dramatic role in not only building, but also in sustaining a service culture.