



The Ser

“We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.”

- Jeff Bezos

Imagine if everybody at your workplace saw customers like they were running their own small business and had what Founder of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, called having a 'Day One' philosophy. Meaning you always act like a start-up, which requires everyone to 'be obsessed with the customer'.

Adopting this philosophy would transform the way all organisations

engage with their customers and revitalise all decisions and systems.

I believe being totally fixated on Customer Service will be the defining factor for the success of all workplaces, both now and into the future to stay relevant. To have a small business philosophy with your customers, you really need to ensure that service is within every part of your business. Put another way, you need to ask, "are our customers the basis of all of our actions and decisions with service deeply embedded as part of our workplace DNA?"

Healthy Customer Paranoia

Des Penny, Co-CEO and Founder of Proteus Leadership and I, have what we believe is a healthy paranoia around our business. We need to demonstrate that we have the confidence of knowing

that we are constantly producing great new leadership programs and events for our clients that are backed up by an exceptional team, dedicated to our customers with innovative automated service systems that only enhance the customer experience AND knowing that we are only three months away from becoming obsolete. And this will be totally determined by our customers! This is the reality and the customer tension we all live by now in business.

I was listening to a podcast interview with Carolyn Creswell, the Australian Founder and Managing Director of Carman's Fine Foods and she was saying that even after two decades in business, she still gets excited when she sees someone in the supermarket who has purchased one of her Carman's muesli bars. She also said, "you have to have a healthy amount of

vice Factor

See Customers Like A Small Business Owner

By Richard Dore



paranoia and don't be complacent and you need to, stay on your toes and live with an entrepreneurial spirit to lead your business."

Has Service Got Worse?

The big question we get asked at Proteus around service is "has customer service become worse or have customer expectations and standards increased?" The reality is that it is both and more. While the principles of great service are the same, the landscape has changed dramatically.

We all know that we are fully ensconced in a digital revolution and with global competition, customers now expect more and demand everything to be 'better, faster and cheaper'. If they don't get this, they will simply move somewhere else where they can get it. Simultaneously, this puts pressure

on businesses to reduce staff while attempting to 'provide more with less resources' which means that customers are often on the receiving end of indifferent attitudes and really bad service standards.

So, customer service has become worse (but only in some cases) and yes, customers do now demand more, which raises the bar in needing to deliver better, faster and cheaper service standards.

However, the other factor we need to remember is that we also now receive amazing world class service that is better than anything from the past (but again, only in some cases).

There are countless examples where I have received outstanding, flawless service that is personalised, intuitively automated and all delivered with beautiful

care and a certain 'Wow-Factor' that I can't wait to share with my family, friends and of course, on social media platforms. As we know, it's no longer 'word of mouth' it's 'world of mouth' and I am more than happy to pay for it.'

This is the modern-day challenge for leaders. How do we create and deliver your version of a world-class standard of great service, while being mindful of increased customer expectations and ever vigilant for when service can go wrong?

Beware of the Negative Service Bias

Being human means we typically default to a 'negative bias'. This is where unpleasant customer service incidents are the ones we recall, and they have an increased negative intensity that burns into our memory.

Stop and think about when and where you have experienced bad customer service and the list will be endless on the people and organisations that are shockers. Think the big banks, telcos, large 'bricks and mortar' retail, bureaucratic government departments, etc.

Interestingly, these traditionally bad customer service workplaces can also get it very right. My experience with getting my driver's licence and car registration changed at VIC Roads in Carlton was nothing but amazing service – I loved everything about it.

This experience was very different to the nightmare scenario of trying to do this in another state many years ago. In this scenario, they were bureaucratic, hostile, indifferent and displayed absolute contempt to all of their customers just trying to get a basic transactional service. We had no choice but to wait and tolerate their rudeness and inefficiencies because they held the monopoly and we could not go somewhere else. The experience was so bad it was almost funny. It felt like I was in a Monty Python comedy skit – except it was real and we were being held hostage!

Let's Decode Great Service and Replicate It

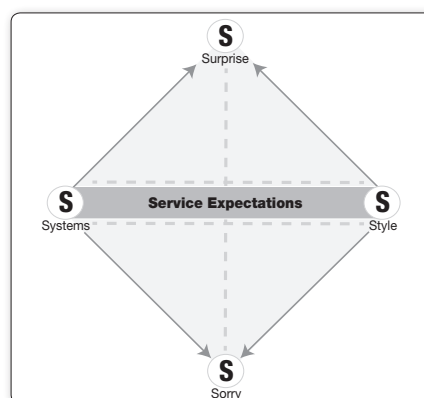
At Proteus, we continually look out for what makes individuals and workplaces provide exceptional service and how they excel at delivering consistent, contemporary experiences to both their internal and external customers with that WOW Service Factor.

There are classic, older examples such as the 1980's airline case study, where CEO Jan Carlzon transformed SAS airlines by delivering on 'Moments of Truth' or the famous 2000's Tony Hsieh 'Delivering Happiness' approach, where he transformed an online shoe retailer called Zappos, winning both service awards and the 'top best company to work for' in the US. There are also current examples like Netflix, where their CEO Reed Hastings and former Chief Talent Officer Patty McCord established a culture of both 'Freedom and Responsibility' and subsequently became one of the most loved companies by their staff and customers.

What we discovered and decoded was that all these great companies do four things exceptionally well. At Proteus, this is what we call the Service Factor Model. The Service Factor is a model with four critical components that we created for anyone that cares and is passionate about replicating great service.

The Service Factor Model

- 1. Systems** – systems and processes are efficient, easy, simple and effective.
- 2. Style** – the attitudes and behaviours displayed are positive and professional.
- 3. Surprise** – customer expectations are exceeded by having a unique X-Factor.
- 4. Sorry** – genuine apologies are your default when things go wrong with an easy fix.



So that is how the Service Factor works. You have to have efficient Systems, great Style, lots of positive customer Surprises and the ability to say Sorry.

I read recently that Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said, "the best customer service is if the customer doesn't need to call you, doesn't need to talk to you. It just works." However, I would add that if customers do want to contact you, it should be easy and they should receive amazing professional Style from you and your staff i.e. great positive attitude. At Proteus, we call this 'High Tech and High Touch' and it is where customers can move seamlessly from your system, to your people and where your people always embody great Style when interacting with those customers.

This can add to your Surprise factor where you exceed expectations by delivering on what makes your service unique along with ensuring you apologise and say Sorry when things go wrong with a quick solution to fix the problem.

Australian Service Mindset

Finally, I believe we need to flip our Australian mindset around 'being of service.' I recently went to Japan for the first time and I was blown away by their culture of service, not only across all of their businesses and infrastructures, but also how the Japanese people appear to have a beautiful service heart as part of their natural DNA.

Unfortunately for many people here in Australia, their perception of working in the service of others is one of being 'servile' and therefore it's 'beneath them' to serve! However, this is simply not true. Being of service is one of the most egalitarian and enriching things humans can do and is something not only to be proud of but should be a life time goal for fulfillment.

Providing great service is about making a choice. You can either choose to be part of a cynical indifferent crowd who treat serving people with contempt or alternatively, you can choose to be part of a tribe of people who believe that serving people is one of the highest forms of human endeavours that enriches lives.

Couple this choice with utilising the Proteus Service Factor model by seeing your customers like a small business owner and you are on your way to creating world class service. It is now up to you and those around you to make the changes required for a new version of customer service.

We are all in the people game; you need to remember the people you work with as much as the people you supply. Never forget that and your business will flourish.

- Carolyn Creswell