

Do You Offer Ritzy Service?

By Bryan Rader ■ *Media Works*

I recently attended a leadership conference presented by senior management of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. It was an all-day event covering topics related to service, customer expectations, guest relations and employee training. I'm sure if they knew that someone was in the audience from a cable TV company, they probably would have asked me to leave!

But, I didn't tell anyone. After all, I believe that the best way to elevate a company's performance is to emulate strategies of other successful companies. And who is better than Ritz-Carlton at satisfying their customers and exceeding their expectations? (Certainly not a cable TV provider, right?)

So I sat through a full day of presentations from general managers of their top hotels, Quality Control Specialists, Training Directors, and the COO. It was an enlightening experience that I think every cable and broadband provider should hear about.

"You have to manage all of the touchpoints that a customer has with your company," announced one of their managers. "What is the look, smell, hear, feel, see and taste of doing business with your company? What would your customer say?"

Ouch, I thought. How well do we manage all of our touchpoints? I knew that Ritz-Carlton manages everything – a bellman takes your luggage, a doorman opens the door, desk clerk greets you, everything smells so fresh. It's a first-class experience. But how is it for PCOs?

Our customer moves into a new community. She calls to sign up for services. Do we make her wait on hold? Does she have to wait three days for the installation? Is the technician clean, efficient, and helpful? Is the first bill correct? And, do we offer all of the services she wants? Hmm, how good do we really

smell, feel or taste to our customers?

When I got back from the conference, I resolved that my company will soon be listing out all of our "touchpoints" with our subscribers so we can better manage each of these transactions. The sum result of these transactions equals a very satisfied or dissatisfied customer.

Another Ritz-Carlton leader stated that, "The myth of excellence is that most companies only do two things exceptionally well. They don't do everything well." He continued to say that, "if you only offer baseline service, you will only meet your customer's expectations. This is not memorable. If you customize your service, you can create a positive memory. That is very impactful."

Do PCOs offer only baseline service? A customer requests a cable service, so we put a tech in the truck and she hooks him up. A more memorable experience may be the extra -- helping a new customer hook up his DVD player, re-programming her TV, explaining the channel line-up and other services available, and thanking the new customer for his business. That sure beats the "hook-em-up-outside-the-unit-and-run-back-to-the-truck" scenario. We want to be memorable.

"How do you handle the recovery process?" asked one of the hotel's leaders. "Do you keep a database to track your deficiencies and defects? Your customer does. So many companies blame the customer when something goes wrong," he stated. And, need I point out, your customer shares his deficiency list with his friends and neighbors and with the folks in line at Best Buy waiting to pay for their satellite system.

My company does a good job of tracking its deficiencies, or in our case our trouble call log. But it's not collecting the data that's important. It's what you do with it. Do you analyze it to fix deficiencies? Do you address the defects?

How many Internet outages do you have to go through before you correct the problem? How often do you lose signal for an important channel before you permanently address the issue? And how well do you "recover" with your customer when something goes wrong?

Lastly, Ritz-Carlton discussed its employees. Their COO stood up and announced "we select people; we don't hire people. Only 1 out of 10 applicants are truly candidates to work here. And once we select them, we train 'em... 250 hours for an hourly employee; 320 for a manager. And on employment day 21, we pull them aside to quickly fix any bad habits. Our people are the most important part of the Ritz-Carlton experience."

Wow – what a challenge. Remember, we can't charge what the Ritz-Carlton does, but over time we probably take in more revenue from a typical customer than does the Ritz. What is the most important part of the PCO experience? Do we select, and train, and monitor, and fix bad habits of our new associates? Or do they jump on customer calls on day one, and begin doing cable TV installs on their first day?

The Ritz-Carlton has a 92 percent very satisfied rating and 91 percent of its guests are likely to recommend staying at the Ritz to a friend. Over half of its guests are repeat customers. Wouldn't you like to have those statistics?

I know I would. Time to begin "puttin' on the Ritz." ♦

About The Author

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