

# **Services Encounter Paper**

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## Service Encounter Paper

### Introduction

Throughout each of our lives, we experience countless service encounters with different firms, ranging from restaurant services to car repair services to financial services. To the average person, these encounters may not cross the individual's mind unless it was an exceptionally terrible experience, one warranting several complaints. This past summer after working as a waitress for my first time, my awareness of the different elements of service at restaurants has increased and caused me to become more critical of my experiences at the different restaurants I go to. In addition to my experience working in the service industry, this Services Marketing class has helped increase my awareness of my satisfaction and dissatisfaction with various service encounters I experience. I now look at each firm more critically and evaluate not only their service and service process, but also their servicescape and how that affects my personal visit to each location.

### Worst Service

When reviewing the service encounter journal entries that I have kept over this past semester, I realized that I have not had many terrible experiences. Even thinking about other service encounters I have had over the semester, I cannot think of many negative experiences, which is a good thing for the companies I have interacted with. However, I have also experienced some not so positive encounters. Time Warner's cable service and their customer service tops my list. However, the service experience I will be discussing in this paper will be my trip to Bob Evans. My criticism may be slightly harsher than an average customer because I worked there this past summer and know what is expected from the servers who work at any Bob Evans Restaurant.

An overview of my experience is that my roommate and I decided to eat there for

lunch one day because she was craving breakfast food, and Bob Evans serves breakfast all day long. Upon walking into the restaurant, we were immediately greeted by the hostess and taken to our seats. The hostess, however, did not really know what seats were available so we had to stand around until she figured out which table to sit us at. Once we were seated, it took a while for our server to come greet us and even longer for her to bring us our drinks and food. The service was slower than usual and our server was not the friendliest person. We were cramped at a small table and did not have much room for all the food we ordered. The meal was delicious as always but the service was lacking. To see more about this experience, check out Appendix 1.

Many times customers go into an encounter with different expectations. My expectations when visiting Bob Evans were based on my past experiences of eating there, as well as my experiences and knowledge of working there. My expectations may be slightly higher than the typical customer because I know the quality of service that is supposed to be provided through the different service procedures. This visit resulted in a failure to meet my expectations, which resulted in dissatisfaction. The expected service quality and my perceived service quality did not match. This difference results in the customer gap and means that the customer's expectations were not met. This is one of their problems during my visit that day, but it is also closely linked to the next issue I will discuss.

Not only was there a customer gap, but there was also a problem with Gap 3. This gap is the Service Performance Gap, which means that the firm was not delivering to their service standards. Through previous employment with Bob Evans, my knowledge of how the server is supposed to perform helped me be aware of this gap inside the restaurant service delivery process. Therefore, not only did I experience the dissatisfaction, but the firm failed to provide the adequate service according to the service procedures outlined by the restaurant management.

Some other problems occurred as result of the restaurant's responsiveness and assurance. Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Our server did not greet us nor take our drink orders in the specified period of time according to the restaurant's service procedures. We waited for quite a while before she got around to taking care of our table; it seemed as if she did not even care that we were there. It also took significantly longer than usual to receive our food. As far as assurance goes, the employees are supposed to be knowledgeable. Our hostess, on the other hand, was not and she should have been aware of what seating was available and where best to put us. If she needed to check on this, she should have not had us follow her around the dining room, trying to find an open table. It is part of a customer's expectations that the hostess should know what seats are available, and she failed to do this on our visit.

I do not like to complain much about Bob Evans. I have always had fairly good service there and have almost always been satisfied with my encounters. The product quality and the outcome quality were great; the food was delicious and we got our food just as we had expected. The main problems of the encounter lie within the service quality and process quality. These are the main areas that need to be addressed. Based on my encounter, I do not believe that these two employees were new members that still were in the process of training. This means that I cannot blame the inadequate service on lack of training. Each server is fully equipped, knowing all of the service procedures before he/she is allowed to wait on tables by himself/herself. In reality, this server has probably been with the restaurant for quite some time causing her to forget some of the service procedures. There are a couple things management should do in order for the servers to consistently perform at top service. One is to routinely quiz or test each server on their service procedures. These service procedures are vital for the customers to receive the quality

service they should be receiving. Bob Evans already incorporates a mystery shopping evaluation, where people come in and judge the servers and hostesses on how well they are performing the service procedures. These aspects need to consistently be refreshed in the servers' minds so that each customer can benefit and have a satisfying experience at Bob Evans, making them want to continue coming back. This is probably the most important area they need to work on. As far as the hostess issue, the restaurant should have some table seating system in place. This helps reduce confusion as to what tables are open, so the customer does not have to follow the hostess around until she finds a good table.

Although I had a dissatisfying experience that one time, I know that I will continue going back to the restaurant. As long as I can remember, I have always been satisfied with the quality of their product – which is the food and my main reason for going. Perhaps I can pass off this one poor service visit because the server had a bad day. While this may not cause me to quit coming, this inadequate service may influence a first time user not to come back. Managers and employees need to keep these things in mind and provide the best service to everyone and act as though each individual's encounter is important. If they do this, they will continue getting those repeat customers where they can eventually call frequent customers by name and build relationships with these individuals. These relationships are vital to the success of a restaurant and by providing quality service, the restaurant can please their customers.

### **Best Service**

Throughout the semester I have had many satisfying service encounters. One of the encounters I am probably most satisfied with was my trip to Cold Stone, an Ice Cream Shoppe in Maumee. This encounter is listed as an appendix at the end of this paper. To recap my experience, my boyfriend and I wanted to go get some ice cream one night because I love ice

cream and it is a good reward after a trip to the dentist. Although I had never heard of the place advertised, we decided to try it out because my boyfriend's brother and fiancé highly complimented their ice cream. We used personal sources instead of trying to find other ways to research and learn about this place. Knowing my love for ice cream, my boyfriend decided to drive us all the way up to Maumee to get ice cream.

Once finding the store, we conveniently parked right in front of the building and walked in. Much to my surprise, we were greeted by the employees ringing bells and singing, a process they did each time a different customer walked in the door, making each group feel welcome to the store. After deciding what we felt like ordering, one of the employees took our order making sure he had all the details correct. He continued to talk and interact with us as he made our own special combination of ice cream and candy pieces.

Going into the encounter, I expected good ice cream as the outcome of my visit. I trusted the word of mouth communications from our personal sources, so my expectations of the quality were fairly high. Cold Stone exceeded my expectations. Not only did I get the delicious ice cream that I desired, but I also got to be involved in the process and say exactly what I wanted. My expected service and perceived service were fairly similar, which means that in my perspective the firm is doing an excellent job of providing service to their customers.

One of the ways I feel that Cold Stone provides a satisfying experience is through their use of different service quality dimensions. There are specifically three areas where I feel Cold Stone is very strong in: reliability, responsiveness, and empathy. The first area is reliability, and this means that the customer can count on the firm to do what is promised. I walked into the shop expecting to receive quality ice cream and that is exactly what I got. Responsiveness is another aspect of Cold Stone's strengths. They are willing to help their customers and provide

prompt service. I was able to be helped without waiting in line for a long time. Finally, I feel empathy is the most important for their firm. Empathy means that they try to make each person feel special. They do this by greeting each group with bells and song as they walk through the door. In addition, each customer gets to be involved with the design of their individual ice cream experience. An experience is exactly what it is. Cold Stone does a good job of creating an experience and atmosphere and not just delivering ice cream like any other regular ice cream place. Cold Stone sets itself apart from your typical ice cream store. I will talk about this point in more detail in a bit. These service quality dimensions are definitely important to the Cold Stone experience and help to enhance the customers' experiences.

Cold Stone uses the expanded marketing mix for their service. People play a big part in the experience of Cold Stone. It is vital that the employees are friendly and make the customers feel welcome so they come back again and again. On the other hand, the customers must do their part in the experience as well. A trip to Cold Stone is a highly interactive process for the customer, and the experience can depend on their level of involvement. This also involves the process of the service delivery. In class, we learned of high customer involvement at places like Fuddruckers; here the customers play a big part in their experience. At Cold Stone, the customers do the same. They get to help invent their own ice cream creation each time they visit. The customer decides what kind of ice cream, what kind of mix-in (brownies, candy, nuts, etc.), and what kind of cone to put it all in. With so many options, the customer can choose what he feels like eating. Cold Stone employees are able to cater to the needs and preferences of each individual consumer as they mix together the special dessert. This principle goes along with adaptability in a customer's source of pleasure. The store easily caters to customer's needs and special requests and is so important in the survival of their franchise. Their high involvement of

customers allows them to customize each order and create an environment and atmosphere you do not find many places. They use these techniques to set themselves apart from their competition and get customers to become loyal because of the specialized attention they provide to each individual person. Finally, the third “P” in the expanded marketing mix is physical evidence. On the walls of the shop, Cold Stone has menus of different ice cream mixtures that are especially popular. In addition, the pictures look so good that my mouth started watering just thinking about the different delicious concoctions I could choose from. This physical evidence gets the customer excited and helps them see what is available. Other forms of physical evidence includes a little brochure featuring pictures of different ice cream cakes they could make, which I felt was a good way to promote their other products and possibly help increase their sales of these items.

Cold Stone’s adaptability contributes highly to my source of pleasure eating there, but I also feel they do well in other areas to make sure I have a satisfying experience. We learned in class that search qualities are attributes of a product that consumers can determine prior to purchase. Not all food places do this, but by offering samples, Cold Stone allows you to taste test different flavors so you know beforehand whether or not that is a flavor of ice cream you want to try on that visit. This helps to increase satisfaction with the final outcome of the service, which is the ice cream itself. Although I am not often dissatisfied with many ice cream places since I usually always love ice cream, Cold Stone goes above and beyond and this is why I feel they are my new favorite ice cream place.

Overall, I thought Cold Stone did an excellent job of providing quality service. I was extremely satisfied with my experiences. Because of this, I will continue going back there when I am in the mood for excellent service and delicious ice cream.

## **Lessons Learned**

Overall, this class and this assignment have increased my awareness of my service experience encounters. My knowledge of service quality, service expectations, and aspects involved in the service process has increased significantly over the course of the semester. While knowing these concepts will better help me judge my own various service encounter experiences, I will also be able to apply some of the principles I have learned in this class when I enter the business world and take my first job.

Upon graduating from graduate school, I will seek employment in the sports industry. This industry falls within the realm of the service industry. Most sports organizations do not have tangible goods for their customers, and they need to rely on creating an experience for the customer. The extended version of the marketing mix is extremely important to keep in mind as the organization operates and interacts with its customers. In addition understanding customer expectations and perceptions and building strong customer relationships are important to the success of the organization. I know now how my company can best use the principles I have learned to give the customer a satisfying experience, one that will make him want to continue coming back for services from my organization.



