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Services Encounter Journal Paper

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Worst Service Encounter

After reviewing my service journal I have concluded that my worst service encounter over the past several weeks has been the poor service that I received at Frickers in Bowling Green. A general summary of the service encounter is that we asked for our food order to go because we had to be somewhere, the order took a lengthy amount of time to be delivered to us, and the waitress did not provide beverage refills, nor was she apologetic to the fact that we were unsatisfied. The specifics of the service encounter can be found in Journal Entry #7 in the Appendix of this paper.

First and foremost, I believe that there were several underlying causes to the unsatisfactory service that we received, because of the variety of problems that we had. I experienced customer dissatisfaction because my needs and expectations were not met at this particular encounter. The first part of the problem is that my brother and I requested our orders to go because we had to be somewhere. I would categorize the cause of this problem under adaptability. We had a special need that placed an extra demand on the waitress. Although she did bring our order to go, she failed to bring the check. Because she did not bring the check the idea of taking the order to go and saving time was obsolete. If she would have brought the order to go, with our check, put it in a bag and gave us napkins and plastic ware she would have been very adaptable to our situation.

Although my to go order was served in a timely manner, the other guest's meals were not. This seems odd because my order was placed 20 minutes after their orders were placed. The other guests waited approximately 40 minutes to receive their food. I would consider the problem in this part of the service encounter a recovery problem. There was a service delivery failure (not getting the food in a timely manner) and there

was little employee response to the failure. The waitress did not even acknowledge that there was a service delivery failure. She never even came out to say sorry about the wait on the food and tell us it would be right out, or offer us a small appetizer to hold the others over until their food arrived.

The third part of dissatisfaction with the service encounter is that the waitress basically ignored us. She did not visit the table often to do what a waitress normally does. She did not offer beverage refills (we had to get them ourselves), nor did she check to see how everything was, once we received our food. I would classify the cause of this problem to be spontaneity. I would consider the waitress' behavior as unacceptable and unprompted. There did not seem to be a reason for her ignoring us. I believe she was only serving one other table, so she could not have been too busy.

To improve service at Frickers, several recommendations should be taken into account. One of the first recommendations that I would make to Frickers would be to determine customer satisfaction and service quality for Frickers in Bowling Green. I have heard from others that they have not always been satisfied with the service that they receive from Frickers in Bowling Green. It is possible that Frickers does not realize that they have a problem with customer satisfaction and service quality. I would recommend that they use the critical incident technique to get stories from the experiences that their customers have had at Frickers. They could provide the surveys on the table and give a reward, such as free fountain beverages or coupons, for filling out a survey.

Another recommendation that I have for Frickers is to strive for 100 percent customer satisfaction. Frickers should make it known to its employees that every customer should be 100 percent satisfied. The first step to implementing a 100 percent

satisfaction plan is to determine customer expectations in each step of the service encounter. This could be done by using the critical incident surveys as suggested above.

When Frickers determines what customers expect during the service encounter, I think they should develop a training program for their serving staff that stresses 100 percent customer satisfaction. First of all Frickers should have a plan for service failures such as a slow kitchen. It is inevitable that service failures are going to happen so Frickers must train their wait staff to handle these situations to make the customers satisfied. I would recommend that there should be time standards for the kitchen. Something like the following could be implemented for a slow kitchen: If the food has not been delivered within 20 minutes of the order being taken, the waitress should acknowledge that there is a problem and check on the order, explain to the customers why the food is going to take longer, she should then offer to bring a small appetizer to the customers if they choose, and ultimately take responsibility for the timely order.

Another theme to incorporate in the Frickers training program should be to facilitate adaptability and flexibility. Waitresses should be trained to acknowledge and recognize the special needs of customers, attempt to accommodate special needs, explain why a particular need can or cannot be met, and most importantly accommodate that special need if at all possible.

Lastly, I believe it is especially important to encourage spontaneity in the Frickers training program. I recommend that the wait staff go above and beyond the call of duty. Memorable service encounters for customers are created by spontaneity. Spontaneity could be something as little as bringing to go boxes for leftovers or refilling beverages

without being asked or as great as paying extra attention to a child and offering things such as toys or crayons and making them feel extra special.

Overall, I feel that if Frickers determines customer satisfaction and service quality levels, and implements a training program that strives for 100 percent satisfaction from every guest, they will be extremely successful at increasing customer retention, promoting positive word of mouth communication, and ultimately increased revenues.

Best Service Encounter

Although I received poor service at Frickers, I received exceptional service at Banana Republic, in the Franklin Park Mall. A general summary of the service encounter is that an employee at Banana Republic was incredibly friendly, and let me try on some shoes with a dress that I was trying on. For specifics on this service encounter see Journal Entry #2 in Appendix I of this paper.

In this particular experience at Banana Republic, I feel that the cause of my satisfaction is spontaneity and my perceived service quality of Banana Republic. Spontaneity is something this service firm does very well. The employee at Banana Republic went above and beyond her call of duty when serving me, making it a memorable encounter for me. She took extra time and was very attentive in serving me. She anticipated my needs, before I even knew what it was that I needed. I did not request to try on a pair of shoes with the dress to get the “full effect,” and I did not ask her to go and get my friend when I had changed into the dress and wanted to “show it off,” but she anticipated those needs and made the service encounter extraordinary. The employee was also extra friendly. She had a smile on her face throughout the entire service encounter and gave very nice compliments to me when I tried on the dress. If the

employee had not been so pleasant and spontaneous the encounter would have been much less satisfactory. I believe Banana Republic encourages employees to be spontaneous in order to receive high levels of customer satisfaction in face-to-face encounters such as this one. I am guessing that at some point during this particular employee's training she was taught to treat all customer experiences as important and was also encouraged to be spontaneous in order to complement Banana Republic's service quality.

Even before I became a customer of Banana Republic, I felt that the service quality was high. In previous times of shopping at Franklin Park, I noticed the tangible things at Banana Republic, things such as the quality appearance of employees, the upscale atmosphere of the store, and the quality image of clothing. All these things created high service quality. It was not until I entered the store and made a purchase that I received high customer satisfaction.

One of the other things that I think Banana Republic is doing well is planning marketing strategies that address the service elements of the marketing mix, people, process, and physical evidence. These three new elements of the marketing mix are essential to create positive perceptions of the service and customer satisfaction. As far as people are concerned at Banana Republic, they are very well trained to provide good customer service. The employee that I dealt with at Banana Republic was extremely courteous, helpful, and knowledgeable. She treated my service encounter as an individual encounter. Since I was trying on a dress, she allowed me to try on dress shoes with it. She catered the service encounter to me and what she thought I would like.

In addition to the exceptional people at Banana Republic, I was impressed at the process. The employee offered to start a dressing room for me, so I would not have to

carry around the article of clothing. While I was trying the dress on she asked if I needed another size. When I decided to purchase the dress she guided me to the cash register and asked if I would like a Banana Republic credit card, gave me my total, and completed the transaction. The process of the service encounter was very smooth and sequential. I did not have to wait for a fitting room or to be checked out, and everything seemed to flow in a logical order. Perhaps if the employee would have never asked if I wanted a dressing room and directed me to the check out corner first, the process would not have been as pleasing to me as a customer.

The physical evidence part of the marketing mix is also something Banana Republic is doing well. When you first walk into Banana Republic you will notice that the store is very appealing. The floors are wood; the lighting is bright which complements the tables and racks of clothing. The dressing rooms are clean and free of past attendants clothing. The flow of the store is also clear. Men's clothing is on the right, women's on the left, shoes and accessories in the back, and the cash register is in the center of the store.

Overall, I feel Banana Republic is doing an exceptional job of services marketing. Their employees are spontaneous and friendly, they portray excellent service quality, they include the service elements of the marketing mix in their marketing mix and because of all of these things they are providing excellent customer service.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the completion of this assignment, I have learned a great deal about service quality and customer satisfaction, including the difference between them. Most importantly though, I have learned what it takes to provide quality customer satisfaction.

I think that learning the sources of pleasure and displeasure in service encounters is very important because if you know this then you will be able to serve customers better, because you more thoroughly understand their sources of pleasure and displeasure.

Another one of the important lessons that I learned doing this project is the importance of people, process, and physical evidence in the services marketing mix. These 3 P's provide service customers with evidence for each service encounter they experience. Before this assignment I did not realize how important they are in the services marketing mix. I also learned how to incorporate these 3 P's in marketing strategies. Overall, I feel this assignment gave me a great deal of knowledge that I need to survive in the service sector of marketing.