



Engaging and Empowering Your Employees

A funny thing happened to me recently at a nearby pizza place. The restaurant was running a special for two slices of New York style pizza and a medium drink for \$8.49. I ordered my pizza and moved down to the cashier to get my drink and pay. When she asked what size drink I wanted, I opted for the smaller drink instead of the huge-sized medium drink. When she rang up my order, it came to \$11.25. I asked “aren’t you having a special today?” Her reply both puzzled and amused me - “yes, if you order the medium drink but you ordered the small drink.” So ordering a small drink instead of a medium drink apparently costs \$2.76 more! I asked for the medium and got the special.

As I was eating my barely adequate pizza, I started to think about that whole transaction and how it made me feel as a customer. I felt like I would have been cheated had I not specifically asked about the special and I was made to feel like I had done something wrong by ordering a small drink. The employee was obviously completely disengaged from her work and could really care less what I paid for my meal. She looked at me with a look conveying a mix of anger and disgust as she had to change my order and recalculate the cost. In short, she took a very common and daily transaction and turned it negative.

Now, supposed I had wandered down the line, ordered my small drink and the cashier said something like, “We have a special today, if you order a medium drink with this, it will save you almost \$3.00.” I would have felt like she was really paying attention and had my best interest in mind. I would have enjoyed my lunch in a completely different frame of mind.

So how do you treat your customers? Perhaps more importantly, how do your front line employees treat your customers?

Here are a few simple steps you can take to help ensure your customers don’t feel cheated:

1. Make sure your staff, especially those that engaged with customers, are well versed in your product and service offerings. Don’t assume they know or they will find out on their own – train them!
2. If you offer any discounts, sales, or specials, have a staff meeting prior to talk about it and make sure everyone is on the same page.
3. Give staff the authority (within boundaries you set) to make sound judgment calls on the spot.
4. Reward employees for excellent customer service. Let them know it matters to you.
5. Solicit feedback from your customers frequently, including at the point of sale.
6. If a customer does call you out on a pricing discrepancy and you are wrong, make it up and then some. Apologize for the mix up and offer them an even greater discount for the inconvenience.

Despite my negative customer experience at the pizza joint, one positive did come from the experience – the cashier served as the motivating influence behind this article!