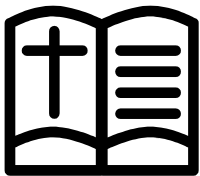


Customer Service Rooted in the Gospel

In the USCCB's recent publication "Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord" it states: "Best organizational practices are consistent with Gospel values, particularly with regards to the management of human resources." Church leaders understand that business still has a great deal to teach us. We are trying to learn from corporate accounting practices and auditing procedures in an effort to increase our transparency and accountability to our parishioners. We have entered the background checking process "better late than never" in an effort to properly screen our employees and volunteers as we have become aware of the potential damages and costs of employing certain people. We have taken up some marketing practices with media savvy as we try to make our gospel message attractive, even compelling. But perhaps we have not focused enough on the basic, "nuts-and-bolts," "Mom-and-Pop"-style, personal, winning factor of good customer service. Especially as it relates to the Gospel...



"Customer service" in the business lexicon is associated with "Service with a smile" and "The customer is always right." It captures an other-centered attitude and "Go the extra mile" extension of oneself that is designed to win over a customer so that they feel great about the transaction. It is personable, creates trust and a degree of relationship, and makes a difference. And most happy customers will want to return and perhaps even refer others. What if we who work or volunteer in the Church offered great customer service? What if we reconfigured what "customer service" means to us, and took our inspiration a level deeper to the Gospel concept of "servant"? As John Lennon sang, ♪ Imagine...♪



Being Servants

No word captures what it means to provide customer service rooted in the Gospel better than the word "servant." God called Jesus His servant when he said: "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen..." (Matthew 12:18). Mary called herself a servant when she responded to the Angel Gabriel's request: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord..." (Luke 1:38). Paul introduced himself to the Christian community in Rome, writing: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus..." (Romans 1:1). Peter opens his second letter with the introduction: "Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ..." (2Peter 1:1).



(Please turn over)

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is defined as a style in which the leader considers himself or herself a servant, a support to others. Under this concept, the role of the leader is to serve others so they can perform their jobs and fulfill their responsibilities. The servant leader subjugates his/her ego, seeking to serve rather than direct. Emphasis is placed on individual and group achievement and initiative, with leaders setting the tone, the direction and the vision. Servant leaders can then begin asking questions like, “How can I help you accomplish your goals?”



We get a wonderful illustration of this leadership style from our Lord Jesus whom we see from the following Gospel passage takes care of his followers.

“So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.” (Mark 1:31). We note that Jesus did not instruct one of His followers to help the woman up so that He could heal her; Jesus went to her and helped her up. He became personally involved in solving the problem – a small detail for someone with such an important mission. What an outstanding example of service for us. Through this simple action, He proves that although it is always easier to say, “Take care of this for me,” at times it may be better to say, “Let me take care of it myself” or “How may I help you?” Your followers will remember and appreciate your personal touch.



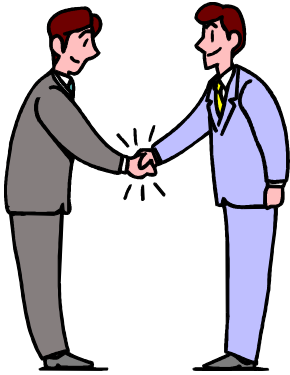
Employees v. Servants: The Tension

The pendulum swung in the direction of considering ourselves as “employees” with certain rights and responsibilities. The Employee Handbook was rolled out a few years ago, and one of the things it probably did was to educate many of us on our rights as employees (and employers). In this important process, we may have sidelined our essential calling to be “servants” in our work. The business concept of customer service may serve as a way to start to integrate the best of both approaches to work. We can treat our “customers” (e.g. employees, volunteers, parishioners, etc.) as “saints” and still maintain professional standards and boundaries. How does our mission (“WWJD”) fit into our 9 to 5?

Creating a Service Culture at Work

A work environment where your employees and you creatively struggle with this tension does not happen automatically. You model it, make it explicit at staff meetings, write it into job descriptions, and nurture it in a variety of ways. If you are serving your staff by removing obstacles to their focus, they will be more productive and imitate your approach. Then you want to reward it when you see it in their actions, with affirmation and thoughtful gestures. Have your team work together on the question: What do we need to change to provide gospel-ideal customer service here? Maybe it’s something as simple as rearranging the furniture in your staff offices to make the “customer” feel more valued, or change the





phone system to encourage more timely responses to calls. You might come up with a simple list of newly required or reinforced behaviors like *Smile, Greet, Respect and Thank*, to set a new floor level of basic expectations.

We should aim to hire people that will fit the service culture you create, and address ways that your staff should be striving toward the high service standard you set in feedback and performance evaluations. You could be seeking customer satisfaction information, perhaps including a survey in the bulletin one Sunday, and figuring out how to feed that input back to staff members appropriately to encourage growth in this area. Maybe you make a computer banner for your office saying something like: "Service with a smile & with a heart!" Over time with your leadership, "customers" will notice a difference. Who knows, you may even attract more people to your church or school!

Some years ago, at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center, we created an Employee Relations Team (ERT) whose members meet periodically during the year (they volunteer their time during the lunch period) for the purpose of identifying ways and means to build community and enhance employee morale in order to make it a more pleasant and productive work environment for all. Some of the recent ERT activities included a multi-cultural potluck celebration; adopt-a-family; monthly birthday celebrations; priests day of affirmation; Thanksgiving food drive; Christmas toy and clothing drives, etc.



Activities sponsored and promoted by the ERT have proved to be highly successful and very popular over the years and this concept could easily be adapted at your parish and school with a minimum amount of time and cost.

If this topic inspires some ideas, and you want to consult with your staff (or with your friendly HR office) on how to make some changes, or if you make changes and find success over time, please let us know (415-614-5539). We always appreciate the feedback.

Here's our **HR Office motto**, which attempts to capture customer service rooted in the Gospel:

- C** - Compassionate, Courteous and Collaborative
- A** - Assists, Affirms, and Advises
- R** - Respectful, Resourceful
- E** - Educates, Encourages and Empathizes
- S** - Serves and Supports

May we use this opportunity to wish you and all your employees and volunteers

A Very Happy and Blessed New Year!