FIVE IMPERATIVES FOR IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY

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LEARNING POINTS SUGGESTED BY CCMD

► Customers assess service quality by comparing the service they receive with that which they expect, in the following areas:

- Tangibles (appearance of facilities, equipment, materials, and staff);
- Reliability (dependability and accuracy);
- Responsiveness (willingness to help and to be prompt);
- Assurance (knowledge and courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence);
- Empathy (caring, individualized attention).

► Service quality can be improved as follows:

Define the Service Role

► Service standards tell employees what are the customer expectations for excellent service. They bring a customer focus into service delivery, and convey a sense of priorities.

► Problems can arise if service standards are: absent or lacking; too numerous; too general; poorly communicated; or unconnected to performance measurement, appraisal, and reward systems.

► Research, not guesswork, is needed for focusing precisely on the limited set of service factors that really make a difference for customers.

Compete for Talent, and Use It

► To the customer, the people performing the service *are* the company.

► Hiring should be decided on the basis of who is best able to meet the service standards. Organizations should think in terms of serving customers, rather than "saving" money on salaries. People value the human dimension of service, and that is where the money should be spent.

► To attract and retain the best people in a tightening labour market, organizations must think in terms of providing full-time work, training and development, and a career path.

► Once the best-qualified people are hired, they should be given freedom to develop and use their creativity in serving the customers. Policies and procedures should not be specified in too much detail. The rule book should be thinned down to the bare essentials, and excessive standardization should be avoided.

Emphasize Service Teams

► Service providers can do much to help each other in a team effort to serve customers. People who might otherwise be fatigued by the service role can benefit from support and encouragement of teammates.

► Service teams can provide faster service and a single point of contact for customers.

Go for Reliability

► Reliability is the single most important feature in judging service quality, and the one which is most often judged as deficient. Little else matters when the service is not consistently dependable, timely, or free from mistakes and errors.

► Services should be analyzed carefully and systematically for "fail points" and problem points.

Be Great at Problem Resolution

► Problems need to be fixed as soon as possible, and the response should be personal, e.g. through a phone call or a visit. This creates an opportunity for dialogue, where it is possible to listen, explain, apologize, and settle the matter.

► Customers should be encouraged to complain, and it should be easy for them to do so. Otherwise, their problems cannot be addressed, and they will remain dissatisfied.

► Problem-resolution standards should be set, and employees should be given the freedom and the means to solve customer problems. The goal should be for front-line representatives to solve most of the problems directly.