

How is your Bedside Manner?

“What emotions do you want your customers to feel when they do business with you? How would you like them to describe the “why” in the sentence, “That’s why I do business with you.”?”

Bedside manner – the manner or conduct of a physician in the presence of a patient, a way of acting or behaving

In his book **Blink, the Power of Thinking without Thinking**, Malcolm Gladwell documents a study that was conducted to determine the most important predictor of whether a doctor would be sued for malpractice. They found that it was the doctor’s bedside manner more than any factor that determined whether they would be sued. The study proved that patients were prepared to give doctors with a good bedside manner the benefit of the doubt and trust them to work in their best interest, even when evidence suggested that the doctor was negligent in some way. Researchers concluded that people simply don’t like to sue people that they like.

Like doctors, all businesses have a “bedside manner” that defines the customer’s experience of doing business with them. Companies with a positive “bedside manner” create a positive customer experience. They are rewarded through customer loyalty and their customers will often give them the benefit of the doubt when they mess up and will recommend them to their friends and colleagues.

Companies that create a positive experience for their customers also tend to perform better. A study conducted between 2007 and 2009, found that the companies who were leaders in delivering

exceptional customer experience as a group “...outperformed the broader stock market, generating cumulative total returns that were 41% better than the S&P 500 Index and 145% better than the ... [companies that lagged in delivering a positive customer experience]”¹.

In many companies “bedside manner” is not managed. There is no consistency in the “bedside manner” exhibited. Their employees are given little or no direction and the customer ends up with an inconsistent (an often unsatisfactory) customer experience.

However, like the doctor, we can choose our company’s “bedside manner” – and the resulting experience the customer has when working with us. There are four steps to developing a “bedside manner” that will deliver a unique and exceptional customer experience. Let’s examine how you can use them to ensure that your company does this.

Step 1: Become clear on the “bedside manner” you want your customers to experience

When you think of a doctor who has exceptional bedside manner, there are a number of attributes that come to mind. They are compassionate.

¹ “Yes, Virginia, There Is A Return On Customer Experience Investments” by [Jon Picoult](#) Feb 06, 2010

They listen. They ask and encourage questions. They don't get defensive when challenged. They take the time to ensure that the patient understands their condition and the options they have for treatment. They tend to have a pleasant manner and treat each patient with respect. All this is combined in a bedside manner that creates an emotional attachment through likeability and trust.

How can you create a “bedside manner” for your business that creates the same, strong emotional attachment and that differentiates you from your competitors? Start by deciding what attributes you would like your customers and prospects to use to describe your firm. What emotions do you want your customers to feel when they do business with you? How would you like them to describe the “why” in the sentence, “That’s why I do business with you.”?

It is a good idea to get input from your customers on this step. Even if you feel that you currently deliver a great (and consistent) customer experience, beware. A Bain & Company study found that although 80% of companies believe they deliver a superior customer experience, only 8 percent of their customers agreed. Ask your customers why they do business with you today. Ask them what would greatly enhance their customer experience in doing business with you. Once you and your team have become clear about what that means for your company, you are ready to move on to Step 2.

Step 2: Decide what will have to happen in each customer interaction to consistently deliver on your “bedside manner” and create the emotional attachment you defined in Step 1

Customers experience our “bedside manner” through their everyday interactions with us. These touch points include every interaction such as visiting our website, dealing with our service technicians or speaking with our credit

department. Sometimes the “bedside manner” being communicated is inconsistent and confusing. A warm and sympathetic service technician can be offset by a cold and distant (and seemingly uncaring) dispatcher for example. Indifference in one interaction can unravel years of hard work in another.

In this step you must convert the attributes you identified in Step 1 into actions that can be implemented by your employees through each customer interaction. Start by detailing the specific interactions a customer typically will have with your firm. Some of the more obvious interactions are between your customers and your reception, dispatch and service technicians. Some of the less obvious may include interactions with your delivery drivers or credit department or simply the receipt of correspondence including newsletters and invoices. Once you have the complete set of interactions mapped out, determine how each can consistently contribute to the customer experience you identified. What has to happen perfectly at each touch point to deliver on the “bedside manner”?

For example, let’s assume that through the process described in Step 1, you and your management team decided to differentiate with a “bedside manner” that creates a customer experience of exceptional personalized customer attention. How do you demonstrate this through your customer interactions? Do you use an automated attendant for customer calls or are calls received by a live person for example? If live, what does that person say when answering the call? How many rings are acceptable before being answered? Nothing is too small to consider. Engage your team in this step and be specific so that it becomes clear to everyone what needs to be done.

Step 3: Identify the roadblocks that might throw you off course

There are many things that can throw you off course. Take time to analyze what these may be

and involve as many of your team members as you can. Consider existing processes, current business culture, skill level of employees, communication needs, etc. Make an extensive list of the roadblocks, prioritize that list and assign accountabilities for addressing them.

Step 4: Implement

Implementation is the Achilles heel of any strategy. Studies suggest that between 70% and 90% of strategies fail. A Fortune magazine article cited that the major reason for this failure is due to poor or nonexistent implementation.

Here are some suggestions to keep you on track.

1. Develop a strong sense of purpose – ensure that everyone is clear about the purpose of the “bedside manner” strategy and what it means for the customer and for them
2. Break down the strategy into achievable components and assign a “Champion” to each to be accountable for its implementation
3. Have the Champions develop clear milestones and time lines and regularly follow-up progress
4. Hold Champions accountable and post the progress in a conspicuous place
5. Publicly recognize those exceptional actions by individuals that exemplify your “bedside manner”
6. Measure customer satisfaction with questions that focus on the attributes of your “bedside manner” to get feedback on how well you are delivering on the customer experience
7. Review any new policies and processes or other initiatives based on whether it is consistent with our “bedside manner”

Conclusion

In today’s challenging environment, the greatest opportunity for sustainable competitive advantage is to create an emotional attachment with your customers through the experience the customer has in doing business with you. The secret to creating emotional attachment is to a) define the experience that will be valued by your customers and the “bedside manner” to deliver on that experience, b) resolve what has to happen at each customer interaction to deliver that customer experience consistently c) identify any roadblocks that could throw you off course and d) create and implement the strategy to make your “bedside manner” a reality.



Jim Baston is the authority on **Proactive Service®**. He has worked with thousands of technicians and their management teams to help them transform the service experience and reap the rewards of windfall profits that were locked in business relationships. He is author of **Beyond GREAT SERVICE – The Technician’s Role in Proactive Business Growth**