

The Secret of Establishing Brand Loyalty

In this competitive economy, companies and brands are competing for our attention and loyalty. How often do they capitalize on opportunities to make a difference? Through a series of recent experiences at a lunch spot in my neighborhood, I have found one company that is making a difference and definitely doing something right.

Customer Service 101

I often eat at my local Jason's Deli. I like their food selection, quick service, and friendly staff. At lunch there one afternoon, I was at the salad bar and noticed an item was missing from their usual selection. As I like to make sure I get my protein during lunch, I was unhappy to find out the restaurant was out of eggs. I mentioned my disappointment to the manager, who promptly went into the kitchen and returned with a heaping pile of freshly grilled chicken. Pleasantly surprised and more than satisfied, I left very happy with the way the manager handled the situation.

A few weeks later, I stopped into Jason's Deli to grab a quick bite. While sitting there, I looked around and noticed a young employee mopping in the corner. I had noticed him before, and remembered seeing him always professionally going about his job, carefully making sure the floors were clean and salad bar countertops were tidy.

When he looked up, I caught his eye and motioned him over. He approached, surprised. I smiled at him and asked, "What's your name?" "Jose," he answered, a little timidly. "Jose," I began, "I just wanted to thank you. I've noticed before that you're always working so hard to make this a clean place and give customers a good experience. I really appreciate it." His face broke into the biggest smile. We talked some more, and I discovered Jose was hoping one day to attend technical college. I gave the young man some more words of encouragement and left.

The next time I stopped in, Jose was there. He saw me walk in and hurried over. "Senor, please come with me..." he took my elbow and ushered me over to the cash register where he started to ring up a free salad bar entrée. Clearly, he remembered me and our conversation! I was determined to pay, but at his insistence, I reluctantly accepted a small complimentary cup of soup. I didn't want to get my new friend in trouble.

Jose animatedly chatted with me a little more and then he cheerfully returned to his work. I realized the powerful impact my compliment had on him, and how he responded back in kind. Taking time to express gratitude is the core of the wingman philosophy. Jason's Deli has done a great job hiring this employee who really "gets it."

A Customer Service Culture

These experiences at Jason's Deli significantly increased and solidified my brand loyalty. Take the first encounter with the manager who provided me with the grilled chicken when the restaurant was out of eggs. He took the time to listen to my complaint and went over and above to remedy the situation. He could've just shrugged his shoulders and made excuses. Although this is customer service 101, a lot of companies still don't get it. You'd be a wingnut to let an unhappy customer walk away! Next, when I decided to thank an employee for commitment to his work, he returned the favor by offering me a complimentary meal. Do you think I'll be eating out with a Jason's Deli competitor anytime soon, given the choice?

In this economy where competition is rampant, there is an opportunity to enhance the customer experience. Jason's Deli is doing something right by hiring the right people and instilling in them fundamental values. Even the smallest task contributes to the bottom line and more importantly, a positive customer experience.

Good leaders also establish a culture of openness. Customers should feel comfortable expressing their opinions, both good and bad. It's okay if someone says something negative, because you have a window of opportunity to turn things around and win a customer for life. It doesn't take a lot.

Jason's Deli is walking the flight line – are you? I encourage you to recognize the people in your personal and professional life and until next time, push it up!

P.S. Check out the photo of me and my new wingman, Jose.

Word Count: 728