

There Is Only One Customer

Energising Organisations through Wholesome Leadership

Abstract

Our view of life affects our way of life. The manner, in which we see our customers, ourselves and our relationship to our customers, will determine our actions towards them. The whole field of Customer Service rests upon a foundation of theory (or worldview) which we hold in our minds. Any changes in the way we interact with our customers will, therefore, need to begin with a change in our way of seeing the world.

In this paper, a spiritual view of life is taken as a basis for a fresh look at customer relationships. The foundation is discussed, and then its implications for interactions with customers are examined. The integral approach of furthering our own and our customers' evolution towards oneness, peace, health & love, is shown to be the only viable route to outstanding Customer Service. Specific guidelines for action emerging from this view are offered to the reader.

The Spiritual View

There is only one whole reality which includes everything. The supplier, the customer, the product, the service and the entire dynamics of relating are all a part of the evolutionary reality which is the unfolding we call life. All is the Divine Self. While it has different layers, like the surface waves and silent depths of an ocean, it is all one. We can see life as a continuous movement for the well being and evolution of people, and ourselves as partners in the process of growth, expansion of bliss, and the development of wholeness. Serving the customer then becomes the same as serving ourselves and serving the cause of the overall good. Seen this way, there is only one customer . . . the whole, the Poorna, the one reality which is Existence, God, life, (or whatever label you choose).

If I take this view of myself in relation to my customer, and see our interaction more like an unfolding dance of evolution rather than a set of transactions, a few other points emerge:

- The boundary between me and my customer becomes very permeable and flexible. Ideas, information, insights, knowledge, feedback, and money flows easily across this boundary.
- When I care for my customer, I am also caring for myself and vice-versa.

- When I am centered in my own Real and Whole Self (that is, I remember who I really am . . . Love, Nothing, Mystery), I spontaneously express myself in a more vibrant, spirited, enthusiastic, playful and authentic way. This creates a very different quality in my interaction with my customer.

In our interaction with customers, we can be facilitating our own evolution or otherwise. At the same time, we can be facilitating our customers evolution or otherwise. The four possible combinations that these throw up can be captured in a matrix shown below:

Facilitating CUSTOMERS' Evolution

		NO	YES
Facilitating OWN Evolution	NO	1 Toxic & Harmful To All	2 Not Possible!
	YES	3 Not Possible!	4 Evolutionary & Loving

Cell 1 represents a situation in which a person is harming oneself and the customer through their products and services. These are products and services born out of greed, fear and desire. They harm both the recipient and the server. That is why they have been called "Toxic" in the matrix above. They take one away from true health or wholesomeness.

Cell 4 makes the product or services a means of facilitating one's own and customers' well being and evolution. These are products and services born out of love, and are inspired by abundance. They are more like a joyful sharing . . . serving out of wholesomeness.

Cells 3 & 2 represent combinations that are not possible. I cannot help my own evolution and well being by harming others. (3) Forget about greedy manipulation! Similarly, I cannot help others by harming myself. (2) Forget about martyrdom and sacrifice! Both these impossibilities are reflections of the basic interconnectedness of life. Harming others is the same as harming myself, and harming myself is the same as harming others. Sometimes it

may appear that one can help others at the cost of oneself. It may also appear that one can benefit at the cost of others. However, both these appearances are illusory. In the long run, and considering the inner aspects of evolution, they are not real and not possible.

The above discussion implies that we can only operate in **Cell 4** if we would like to contribute to the overall common process of unfolding bliss, ease, wholesomeness and peace in ourselves/others/the whole. This is the path of light and love (caring for the overall good).

The market-place therefore need not be un-spiritual. It can be an opportunity to share our gifts, express our uniqueness, be creative and compassionate, and to see everything as our Guru . . . our nudger, pusher, guider, shatterer and comforter on the path of evolution. This will be so, if we keep in mind the basic evolutionary/spiritual purpose of life, and make everything subservient to this larger purpose.

Ideas for Action

Having gone through the above you might ask the question . . . "So where do I begin?" Right here and now!

Start with your own body, a customer who stays with you till the end. Are you comfortable? Can you do something to give it more peace and ease . . . like a stretch? Does your body need more exercise? Less exercise? Better diet? What are the few steps you can take to align your life more with your Higher Purpose? What do you need to start doing and stop doing?

A few more guidelines for our interactions with customers:

- 1. Work from inner fullness/ abundance.** By being our intrinsic fullness, born of a clear understanding of our real Self, let our interactions with customers be a sharing out of this fullness. As Khalil Gibran puts it, let our interaction be "an overflowing from our own full cup". Let not the customer become a means of satiating our deficiency.
- 2. Liberate the customer.** Let our work set customers free. Facilitate them in finding their own resources of fullness. Allow benefits to flow freely. Let us not create dependency in our customer. The greatest gift you can give your customers is to awaken them to their own capacity and resources. Let us not sell water to people who have a river running in their backyard!

3. **Work from your uniqueness.** Express the very best you have building on the uniqueness of your own team. Be true to your own inner calling as an individual. Honoring our own uniqueness and being true to our own calling (swadharma), creates a natural and integral process in which our sharing with the customer is aligned with the expression of our own unique gifts. This helps our own evolution. Let us not be copy-cats and "me-toos". Let our own uniqueness be our brand. Otherwise, we will be driven by the market place and not by your own inner vision and deeper values.
4. **See the customer as your own Self.** See him or her as divine. When Kabir would weave cloth and take it to the market place, he would give it to the customer saying, "Ram, I have woven this for you with great love . . . please keep it carefully". Remembering who you really are and remembering who the customer really is eliminates all fear. It creates a space of playful oneness, which is the source of new ideas and excellent service.
5. **Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.** When we remember that the customer is giving us an opportunity to serve him / her which, in turn, is helping us to grow, we can only feel gratitude towards the customer. This spirit of gratitude creates a different interpersonal chemistry in both the customer and in your self. It floods your blood with chemicals like beta-endorphins that make you naturally peaceful.
6. **Be mindful and conscious.** This means being a sensitive listener and fully understanding our customers' needs. I have always believed that listening is a beautiful practice for managers to cultivate mindfulness. Listening to your own body and mind as you are interacting with a customer grounds you in a space of presence and peace. This has its own positive ripple effects on the customer.
7. **Be playful.** Let us be sincere but not serious in serving our customers. Let us be open to new possibilities. Let us be present to the here and now, and see life as an unfolding play in which we can co-create new things with our customers. Let us trust the evolutionary movement of life and let go into this flow. Let us not try to kill ourselves trying to please our customer. Remember that we are also our own very important customer! Be playful and creative in finding the right balance in different situations.

8. Lets be Wholesome. Wholesomeness is being balanced and being whole. It is being Healthy in the widest sense of the word. Wholesome people create wholesome quality in their products and services. These are born out of bliss and therefore naturally give a fragrance of this bliss to customers. Besides the intrinsic and instantaneous rewards that such service provides, it is also the foundation for material rewards. The world rewards excellent quality, which benefits other people. Such quality is a natural outcome of a spiritual/wholesome approach to life and work . . . One which we are coming from an inner space of compassionate and overflowing care.

So let's begin this process by taking care of our self. Understanding our own intrinsic oneness with love spontaneously leads to more caring perceptions and actions. This in turn leads to wholesome quality which means actively caring for:

- All aspects of myself.
- My family (present, future, immediate, extended, global).
- My colleagues at work.
- All aspects of my internal customers.
- Our external customers.
- Resources in the workplace.
- Our competitors.
- The physical environment.
- The psychological environment.
- The long term along with the short-term etc.

It means caring for the whole by being whole. Working from this space will spontaneously lead to overall well being and growth. No part suffers at the expense of the other. True boundarylessness exists and propels us further towards being the ocean of oneness, which is life as it, is really is.

9. Lead customers to the source of all values . . . their own Self. This is the highest "value addition" we can give to our customers. It is more like value uncovering, because the customer is intrinsically valuable. S/he is the infinite Self . . . the direction in which all our desires ultimately point. Can all our products and services contribute to the unfolding of this intrinsic value while at the same time satisfying the immediate

needs of the customer? Products and services born out of a wholesome understanding of life will spontaneously catalyze people towards this understanding. Similarly, interactions with customers born out of love will be like sunlight is to a plant . . . nourishing it and strengthening its growth.

Conclusion

By expanding our view of life to the spiritual . . . the most complete and wholesome view, we can alter the way we see and interact with customers. The integral approach of furthering our own and our customers' evolution towards oneness, peace, health & love, then becomes the only viable route to outstanding Customer Service.

We can carry this out in practice through the action-pointers given in this paper. This kinship through customer service based on a spiritual view of life will then slowly ripen into a mysterious oneness and unifying understanding.

Then, we are no longer related to the customer, we are the customer. There is then, only one customer, which is the whole of Existence. We then become the server, the customer who is served, the playful dance of customer service, and the one who watches this Lila (or play). Serving our customer is then the same as serving God, and contributing to our own highest evolution.

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