

Marketplace

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An insight into advertising • marketing •

Customer satisfaction & service — SA has a long way to go

AT the recent *Finance Week*-sponsored 'Customer Service & Satisfaction Conference' it became quite clear early on that the South African business industry would have to change drastically the way it thinks and operates to be able to claim that it really puts its customers/clients first.

Dr Colin Armstead from the UK, speaking on creating and implementing service strategies, names the four common types of business operations:

1. **THE NATURALS** — those who provide the best service and retain customers over a long period.

2. **THE ASPIRANTS** — those trying hard to get into the above category.

3. **THE FOLLOWERS** — those who have tried, have paid lip service but have failed to follow through.

4. **THE LAGGARDS** — those who didn't even try (these are great users of slogans).

Armstead maintains that each business should accurately assess its current service and then create a 'strategic service vision'. To implement this 'vision', it would need capable processes, capable people, capable systems and a culture and communication system geared to service.

The reason some companies fail:
* When times get tough, they cut back on customer service.

* Managers don't consider 'eye on the ball' and their other responsibilities as part of customer service.

* Products are moving from simplicity to complexity (e.g. those in the banking industry) but managers and staff are not keeping pace.

* Dehumanisation of employees and disregard for social problems.

Employees represent the face of the organisation to the customer/client and it is critical that the right people (including management) are trained for the service role. This means a paradigm shift away from people being regarded as a commodity to being a resource.

Another impressive speaker was Judi Moreo from Las Vegas, talking on the dynamics of customer service:

"Why should a customer buy your product/service? Your products are similar in quality and price to your competitors'. You have to understand the needs and expectations of your customers; provide better service than your competition to improve your customer relations. 68% of customers who do not return to purchase your product or use your



Judi Moreo — one of the dynamic speakers on customer service.

service do so because of the attitude of the people who work for you."

The message coming through from the other speakers was:

- Identify your real problems
- Listen to your staff
- Set appropriate standards and raise your staff's attitudes and expectations to meet them

- There must be a 2-way channel of communications between your company/staff and your clients/customers.

The customer is not always right — but he is ALWAYS the customer.