



**Resource
Development
Systems LLC**

Managing the Human Side of Business™

Making a Customer Connection™

By Gary Lear
President & CEO

A couple of months ago I was doing some grocery shopping in one of our local grocery stores. It is the last day of the sale for that week. There were some sale items that I wanted to pick up, including some laundry detergent that my wife wanted. So here I am, standing in the laundry detergent aisle, and I could find the liquid version of the brand that was on sale, but not the powder that my wife wanted. I was actually on the phone with her asking her about the detergent when a store employee came walking down the aisle from the back. I was sure I was rescued.

I quickly stopped the clerk and asked him if he could direct me to the powdered version of the laundry detergent that they had on sale. The clerk was a young male, perhaps just out of high school. He was dressed very nicely, was well groomed, and was very polite; all in all, very professional. He appeared to become very uncomfortable, however, as he looked at the shelves. He apologized profusely and stated "I'm sorry, I don't know. I'm just a cashier." He looked at the shelves again, shrugged, and again apologized and hurried off. While he was certainly nice and polite, I was left still standing in the aisle all by myself, still without the powdered laundry detergent that I'd come to get.

My comment to my wife, who was still on the phone with me, was "now that's a real engaged employee" in a very sarcastic tone. She laughed and agreed. Needless to say, I did not buy that detergent, and therefore, the store lost a sale and a potential increase in revenue.

There were all sorts of things this employee

could have done to take care of my situation. Instead, he believed he was "just a cashier" and that's all he was responsible for doing for his pay. As long as he was accurate in scanning groceries and was polite to the Customers he felt he was doing a good job. I'm sure he didn't think about the fact that if I don't buy groceries then he might not have a job because he won't have anything to scan. He could have easily gone off and found someone who worked that department to help me, or at least a manager who could take care of me. Yet, no real attempt was made to resolve my issue.

Many would immediately blame the employee for not doing more. I didn't and still don't. I blame his manager and right up the line right to the CEO of the organization. They have failed to help that employee learn what his real job was, which is to serve the Customer of the store, not to just check out groceries. They failed to help that employee make a connection between that employee and the Customer.

I suppose that it would be different if this were an isolated incidence. But this isn't the only case of poor Customer service that my staff and I have experienced in this store, and not just at one location, but several. It is clear that their employees just don't understand what their "real" job is.

But this organization isn't alone. There are countless numbers of employees that go to work every day that think they are

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“just” a bookkeeper, server, phone technician, mechanic, and countless other jobs. They go to work and do their job with little or no thought about how what they do impacts the Customer of the organization. What’s worse, they have no idea how what the Customer does in reaction to their efforts impacts on the organization’s success and their ability to maintain a job.

Many employees don’t have direct contact with the Customers of their organization. So when they have errors or make mistakes, they probably don’t think about how it might make the Customer feel about their organization. Some just think of the task at hand, and not thinking of the larger process that includes the Customer’s reaction to the service provided along with the product. The cashier mentioned earlier certainly didn’t think about the larger process, just his task of checking out groceries.

If an organization is to be highly successful it must begin to help it’s employees make a better connection between employees and the organization’s Customers, and connect the Customers’ patronage back to the success of organization and the employee. It is this Customer Connection™ that makes the real difference and makes the outstanding organizations actually stand out. That means that managers must take the time to help employees to understand their own individual connection to the Customer, even if it is through several levels.

It also means that organizations and their managers must stop focusing on tasks and place a larger focus on processes. It is not enough to just “smile” and “be polite” to a Customer. Yes, failing to do this can certainly alienate a Customer. But just doing these tasks does not make a Customer Connection™. It is the overall

process of delivering the products and services to the Customer in a way that meets and exceeds their expectations that creates the emotional connection between the Customer and the organization.

Customers that don’t have a Customer Connection™ to an organization can be easily persuaded to leave. All it takes is a simple difference in price, or perhaps even the fact that they might actually get a Customer Connection™ from a competitor. What ever it is, it can certainly have a negative financial impact on the organization. Maybe it doesn’t happen right away. But eventually those Customers that haven’t been connected with will slip away to someone else. And you can’t make that Customer Connection™ in any other way except through your contact with them via your employees, either through the products they make or the services they provide.

All things are connected: organization; employees; and the Customer. It is up to the leadership of the organization to insure that employees understand their connection to the Customer, focus on the processes that connect that Customer to the organization instead of just doing tasks, and how maintaining that Customer Connection™ can mean success for the organization and the employee.

Making a Customer Connection™ can provide any organization with a clear competitive advantage, and it doesn’t cost a thing. But the rewards can be

*Gary Lear is the President & CEO of **Resource Development Systems** LLC, an organizational performance research and consulting firm that helps organizations increase performance by more effectively **managing the human side of business**sm, resulting in the achievement of their goals.*

Contact Resource Development Systems, LLC for more information.