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Loyalty through Enthusiasm?

Research has revealed that customer satisfaction alone does not ensure the success of a brand or organization in the market. It is enthusiastic customers who can ensure success. Many a company has reported highly satisfied customers. However, these same customers often have no hesitation in switching brands, retailers and even companies. This is because the customers were satisfied but not enthusiastic. A prime reason for product dissatisfaction lies in the lack of employee ability to motivate customers. Evidently, the key focus of an organization should be to increase employees' enthusiasm towards the company brand before spotting enthusiastic customers and increasing their numbers. This is where *Satisfaction-Enthusiasm Matrix* (SEM) comes into play.

How do we identify enthusiastic employees and consumers? According to David M. Szymanski, employees and consumers are satisfied when performance meets expectations. They become delighted when performance exceeds expectations. However, when performance consistently exceeds expectations, both employees and consumers become enthusiastic brand ambassadors because of higher emotional commitment and identification.

Spotting the enthusiastic consumer

Evidently, it is more profitable for an organization to focus on creating a strong base of satisfied customers, before fine-tuning its product/service offering to increase the number of delighted and, finally, enthusiastic customers. Now comes the key question – How does an organization identify the presence of an enthusiastic group in its satisfied customer base? All that needs to be done is to have something very informal and cost effective like a company sponsored picnic. If the company's customers are merely satisfied but not enthusiastic, not all will turn up. However, if the customers are truly enthusiastic, they will willingly take part in any company sponsored activity – free or otherwise. For example, when Harley Davidson held a picnic for its customers as part of its 100 year celebrations in summer 2004, it had more than 200,000 customers attending the event. In general, organizations may organize some celebration or customer appreciation event to ascertain whether its customers will attend the meet or not.

Basically, customers rate their satisfaction levels on the basis of two parameters: disconfirmation and perceived quality of exchange. Disconfirmation is the difference between real performance and the customers' anticipated or expected performance. Equity of exchange is the customer's perception of whether the organization treated him and its employees fairly in comparison to other customers.

At the level of enthusiasm, the organization or brand becomes a part of both employee and consumer identity. While employee enthusiasm is reflected in the way they deal with their customers, enthusiastic customers reveal their positive experiences with the brand through their body language and actions. Incidentally, nobody can be a better brand ambassador or promoter than such an enthusiastic customer.



TenStep Supplemental Paper

The employee's role

A customer is often as enthusiastic about a brand as the brand marketer. In other words, the Chief Executive should be enthusiastic about the organization, its business, products, customers and employees. At the next level, the employees should feel enthusiastic about the organization they are working for, their role in the organization, the products/services they deal with and the customers they serve. Such a heightened level of enthusiasm gets transmitted to the customer and in turn, motivates employees. Hence, the leader should ensure that all employees have a common vision. Employees need to understand and take initiative on occasions when they have to do that extra bit to ensure customer satisfaction and enthusiasm. In this regard, employees have to create creative moments so that they appear special.

In effect, organizations should focus on including motivated employees and enthusiastic customers in their business models. Enthusiasm of both employees and customers should be considered as a positive attribute that drives an organization's bottom-line. If this objective is pursued with commitment and meticulous planning, favorable results are bound to follow.