



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### Gaps Galore

Dual-income households are becoming more and more common. This has led to a new need in families - more time. Overstressed with work and travel, people often find it impossible to perform even routine tasks. This has given rise to unconventional new services, making service quality the latest buzzword in corporate boardrooms.

So, how is the service provider to go about the difficult task of analyzing his business operations in order to ensure quality service?

Understanding consumers' quality expectations is the first step in delivering service quality. At the heart of long-term customer retention and relationship marketing is the service perception of the customer. Consequently, like the other basics of success, service has become the centerpiece of customer satisfaction in the service business.

A consumer judges service quality on functional as well as technical grounds. This judgment is usually based on the following five dimensions (with the acronym RATER):

- Reliability
- Assurance
- Tangibility
- Empathy
- Responsiveness

One aspect of service that truly stands out amongst the rest is the element of risk. What happens to consumer expectations when risk increases due to the nature of intangibility of services? If consumers cannot see the tangible outcome of the intangible service, it becomes impossible for them to decide what they should expect. What are the gaps in the market that need to be closed?

The Gaps model of service quality by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry encourages service providers to first recognize the deficiencies in their service and then work toward rectifying them.

The five distinctive gaps between what customers expect and what they perceive as received are:

- **Gap 1: Market Information Gap.** Marketers may have an inaccurate understanding of what customers actually expect. The reason for this gap is a lack of proper market/customer focus.
- **Gap 2: Standards Gap.** Marketers know what consumers want but are unable to translate customer expectations into service quality specifications. This may happen due to technical glitches in service design, lack of resources, or service delivery.



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- **Gap 3: Service Performance Gap.** This gap is between customer-driven service standards and the actual quality of service provided by the employees. Bridging this gap is critical to the success of any organization and requires the empowerment of human resources. Since service quality is perceived at the point of interaction between the service provider and the customer, control over the service encounter by the company is crucial.
- **Gap 4: Communication Gap.** Often, companies promise much more in advertising than they can deliver. This happens through advertisements, hoardings, sales force and other communication.
- **Gap 5: Perception Gap.** This is the consequence of the organization's failure to close the gaps mentioned earlier. It is the total discrepancy between the customer's expectations and his or her perception of the service. It represents the overall measure of service quality through the customer's eyes.

### Summary

The marketer should understand his customers' diverse requirements and the shortfalls in his or her service. By understanding where the gaps lie, he/she should enhance service quality.