

August 2009

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Singapore Service STAR

The Singapore Service Star was initiated and rolled out by the Singapore Tourism Board in 2008. It is an accreditation scheme with an objective to recognise and promote businesses that deliver good service and exhibit sound business practices. The scheme aims to raise and instil greater confidence for the tourists when transacting in Singapore, hence delivering a truly unique experience for the visitors while showcasing its service excellence.

More information on the scheme can be obtained from the following website: <http://www.servicestar.com.sg>.

Service Excellence for Businesses

Service excellence has grown in importance over the last few years, as clients have become increasingly demanding in their service requirements. Clients are now much more sophisticated and understand their consumer rights. They also often know what they want and will often go to great lengths to achieve it.

Improving service levels should be an ongoing process and tends to be client-focussed. Service excellence is about “exceeding customers’ expectations, not just meeting them, and paying attention to details”. It involves focusing on the expectations and needs of the client, and making the client the starting point for change. The objective of service excellence for any business is to “move clients up the ‘staircase of loyalty’”, which is hoped to convert them into regularly “purchasing clients, who are then progressively moved through the organisation from being strong supporters of the company and its products and services to being active and vocal advocates, and can also play an important role as a source of referrals”.

Some of the benefits of service excellence include;

- improved relationship between clients and businesses
- promotion of innovation and creativity in the delivery of services
- recognition of employees who deliver excellent service
- higher levels of confidence in the businesses

Service Excellence Model



Source: Handbook on service excellence: A guide to service excellence in public management with lessons from best managed companies. (n.d.). Retrieved July 6, 2009, from <http://unpan1.un.org/intrdoc/groups/public/documents/CGG/UNPAN026214.pdf>

Establishing a Culture of Service Excellence

Establishing a culture of service excellence can be a catalyst for the service excellence strategy that is implemented by businesses to move forward. It involves building leadership and developing a service excellence team.

Building Leadership

Leadership drives businesses, and excellent leaders set the standard and example for others. It brings out the best in people and encourages individual strengths. The commitment shown by the senior management to service excellence can instil a service excellence vision and create an organisational climate that is conducive to the goals and principles of service excellence. The senior management is also responsible to ensure all employees are given proper training to deliver excellent service. They should facilitate and celebrate progress in service excellence goals and promote teamwork by building commitment to attaining the end-results.

Assess the Current State

It is critical for businesses to define their clients and services they offer, and “constantly communicate with the work team and clients” to assess the current state of their services. Business can also undertake the following four stages of defining their services;

1. Ask what is to be accomplished.
2. Ask what services are needed to achieve these goals.
3. Ask what services they provide.
4. Ask how their services are delivered.

Listening to the Clients

To deliver excellent service, businesses need to listen and respond accordingly to their clients. Businesses should gather feedback from their clients on the key components of excellent service for them, for example; accuracy, accessibility or timeliness. Service standards should also be developed and put in place to reflect and manage the expectations of the clients. Businesses need to consult their clients to gain feedback on the services that have been delivered, and check if they are satisfied with the results.

Listening to the Team

Team members should not be left out in the assessment. Ask them of their role in the delivery of services. Gather the feedback they have received from their clients, and document their views and opinions on how the service could be further improved and at what cost.

Developing a Service Excellence Strategy

Service excellence can be integrated into the business planning process, the businesses’ mission, performance management and performance reporting process. The implementation of full service excellence framework is a continuous process. The goals that are set need to be challenging, yet achievable. It is also important to establish goals that are just right in number. Businesses need to be challenged “but not overwhelmed”.

Establish Service Excellence Standards

A service standard measures the level of performance that is “critical to achieving a broader goal”. Establishing service standards is beneficial for both the clients and the team. Through the service standard, clients are able to measure their expectations on the services that will be delivered and what they can do if the services received are unsatisfactory or unacceptable.

Service standards should be tailored to the needs of the clients. It should include a description of the service, a service pledge, delivery targets and the processes that would be applied when addressing concerns or issues.

Some examples of service standards include;

- Clients will receive service within ten minutes of their arrival.
- All telephone messages will be returned within one working day.
- All causes of concerns will be explored and meaningful responses will be delivered.

Developing Service Excellence Standards

It is critical for businesses to do their homework prior to developing service standards. They should assess the needs of their clients, in particular where it involves communications with the latter. It is important to value and acknowledge each individual client’s concerns in a timely manner.

Here are some tips on developing service excellence standards;

- Develop internal and external service standards.
- Know the services that you are providing, before establishing level targets.
- Service level targets should be challenging enough to motivate the team, yet achievable.

Effective Standard	Ineffective Standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will direct you to the right contact person on the first referral. All client feedback will be considered valid and clients shall receive a meaningful response addressing their concerns within two weeks unless notified otherwise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone is answered within three rings. All correspondence shall be replied to within five working days.

Source: Handbook on service excellence: A guide to service excellence in public management with lessons from best managed companies. (n.d.). Retrieved July 6, 2009, from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/CGG/UNPAN026214.pdf>

Build Capacity in the Organisation

Commitment to service excellence is enhanced through employee involvement, initiative and creativity. Businesses should endeavour to be a learning organisation. Team members should be supported in sharing positive work experiences and experiences where there were opportunities for improvement. These experiences enhance the team's service skills and incorporate best practices in service delivery.

Employee Participation

Frontline staff have the most contact with clients, thus they are the most knowledgeable on what should be changed to improve the delivery of services. Inputs from all members of the team should be sought, regardless of service supporters or frontline service deliverers. The data collected from team members could be used to supplement the client feedback about the services delivered.

Recognition for Excellence and Innovation

Recognition, through honouring, encouraging and supporting individuals and teams who contributed to the success of service excellence, is one of the most essential elements of service excellence. Recognition displays that organisations valued the individual and collective contributions of their employees.

Here are some tips on recognising service excellence;

- Identify award and recognition systems that are already in place.
- Grant recognition to both individuals and work groups.
- Promote partnerships by recognising the contributions of clients and stakeholders to the achievement of organisational goals.
- Develop a variety of means to communicate achievements of award recipients. The means chosen should reflect the importance of the achievement.
- Recognition should not be reserved solely for exceptional achievements. Making everyone eligible for recognition allows an organisation to motivate, support and encourage everyone.
- Encouraging and championing employees' suggested improvements are one of the most powerful forms of recognition available.

Training for Service Excellence

It is necessary for the work team to have access to learning supports. This is to develop the skills necessary to provide and deliver excellent services. Team should also be involved in the development of a training package.

Measuring Service Excellence Goals

A critical component of service excellence is objective and meaningful measurement, which can be a challenging task. An accurate and effective measurement system may require years of consistent, incremental work to achieve. Also, measurement of any subjective or attitude variable is never precise, and may sometimes be relatively unreliable. Hence, measuring service excellence though may be challenging, it is not an impossible task. The objective components of service excellence should be measured, which includes measuring items that have a direct casual relationship.

What to Measure?

Businesses should first decide on what they want to improve, where the audience and purpose must be clearly defined.

Some components for measurement may include the following;

- Physical facilities – accessibility, telephone access, professional appearance, hours of service, signage, use of technology
- Communications – clarity, availability, use of plain language
- Personnel – courtesy, helpfulness, competence, empathy, clarity, fairness, responsiveness
- Services received – timeliness, value, appropriateness, adequacy, quality, safety, reliability

When to Measure?

The service excellence components should be measured on an ongoing basis. This will allow for up-to-date information and the assessment of the impact of changes implemented enhancing service delivery. Normally, the best set of performance indicators includes those from ongoing measurement systems and from the periodic in-depth reviews of service delivery.

After the Measurement

The results of the measurement process should then be analysed and communicated to the team, before discussing on potential improvements. “While it is important to make enhancements to the measurement instrument/processs, it is best to keep some measures steady over time”. This allows for comparisons of the performance from one year to the next. It is also important to assess the measuring process itself. Businesses should look into any other tool which is more effective, and think through if there are other performance indicators that should be included.

The next process is responding and following-up with the results. The following model could assist businesses in determining the relationship between the importance and performance of a service.

<i>Low importance / high satisfaction rating</i>	<i>High importance / high satisfaction rating</i>	Low	Client Satisfaction
MAINTAIN SERVICE LEVEL	CRITICAL SUCCESS AREAS		
The service is deemed to be of low importance but the client is satisfied with the service. The service provider needs to maintain level of service.	Important areas of service to clients in which the public service also performs well. This scenario is the goal of the service provider.		
<i>Low importance / low satisfaction rating</i>	<i>High importance / low satisfaction rating</i>		
AREA FOR CHANGE	AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT	High	
The service is both unsatisfactory and of low importance. The service needs to be evaluated for restructuring or discontinuation.	The client believes that the service is important but is not satisfied with the service. The improvement of the service provided needs to be the highest priority of the organisation.		
Low	High		
Importance			

Source: Handbook on service excellence: A guide to service excellence in public management with lessons from best managed companies. (n.d.). Retrieved July 6, 2009, from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/CGG/UNPAN026214.pdf>

Evaluate the Service Excellence Strategy

Evaluating service excellence is part of the learning process for organisations, where the essential ingredient includes describing the process that assists participants achieve outcomes. Goals, outcomes, strategies and performance measures should be evaluated and assessed. It is critical that the performance of service excellence produces timely, relevant, credible and objective findings based on valid and reliable collection and analysis. An effective evaluation comprises “no significant error of fact or logic, includes important findings – both positive and negative, and present findings and conclusions in a framework which indicates their relative importance”. Also, it is important that the results are shared and communicated to the team and clients.

Communicating Service Excellence

Communication plays a vital role in service excellence. An effective communication plan can assist the organisation in “educating employees, internal and external clients about the organisation’s service excellence plan”. The communication process demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to a service excellence culture.

How Do I Communicate?

- Develop a communications plan for external and internal clients, work teams, and service partners.
- Make a public commitment to service excellence.
- Use a variety of ways to communicate; newsletters, magazines, Internet, business plans, surveys, telephone calls, feedback tools and point of contact.

Who Do I Communicate With?

- Clients: Consult with clients at every stage of service excellence strategy.
- Team members: Communicate with the team about the goals of service excellence. Ask clients how they believe the team can deliver better services.
- Other service providers: Keep in touch with other relevant organisations to share information on how to improve the delivery of services.

What Do I Communicate?

- Internet and external clients: what services you provide, formal and informal reward and recognition events, results of service excellence feedback.
- Team members: principles of service excellence, what their role is in service excellence, results of performance measurements.

- Service partners: principles of service excellence, importance of supporting service excellence.

Ten Key Elements of Service Excellence

The ten key elements of service excellence are;

1. Servant leadership.
2. Service vision.
3. Employee empowerment.
4. Customer contact (moment of truth).
5. Service technology.
6. Service standards communication.
7. Service failure prevention.
8. Service failure recovery.
9. Service training and development.
10. Service rewards and recognition.

Case Study

Walt Disney Company: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service

Walt Disney World has transformed the entertainment industry, and has pushed “the envelopes of visual and electronic effects, psychological packaging and land management. They receive and entertain millions of visitors each year, and the energy that powers this city is called ‘magic’.

The Walt Disney Company has determined that a typical visitor at any one of its theme parks will average 60 ‘contact opportunities’ – points at which they come into contact with a cast member. Hence, Disney wants each of those opportunities to be a magic moment for every visitor, who they called guests, where each cast member is encouraged to be “proactively helpful”. The secret to Disney’s success is its well-trained, enthusiastic and motivated work force. This was realised by Walt Disney himself, who was quoted as saying, “You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world, but it requires people to make the dream a reality”.

In providing their guests with greater diversity of experiences, Walt Disney World has brought in new partners onto its properties. This poses a challenge for them to maintain Disney standards in restaurants and hotels that the company does not own, in their attempt to create a seamless experience for guests despite the two separate business entities. Disney is also aware that customer retention requires customer satisfaction. Delighting their repeat guests, whom Walt Disney is dependant on, requires raising the bar of service with every visit. Exceeding their guests’ expectations is a standard call to duty, which requires paying close attention to every aspect of the guest experience. It also involves analysing the experience from the guests’ perspectives, understanding their needs and wants, and “committing every element of the business – from the design of each element of the infrastructure to interaction between the guest and cast – to the creation of an exceptional experience for each of them”.

The Quality Service Cycle

Disney’s quality service cycle begins with knowing and understanding the “needs, wants, perceptions and emotions of its guests”, which Disney termed as ‘guestology’. The information

gathered from the guestology provides the basis for movement through the cycle.

Disney's quality service cycle comprise four main elements;

- A service theme
- Service standards
- Delivery systems
- Integration

A Service Theme

The cycle is "centred on the organisation's service theme", a simple statement that is shared among the employees and becomes the driving force of service. Disney's service theme is: 'To create happiness for people of all ages, everywhere'.

Service Standards

Service standards set the criteria for actions necessary to accomplish the service theme. They also serve as the measures of quality service.

Disney's four service standards, in order of importance, are;

1. Safety
Disney ensures that safety concerns are addressed in every element of the Disney resorts and parks. Additionally, apart from the large component of dedicated security staff, Disney's entire cast is also taught safety procedures and location specific safety practices.
2. Courtesy
By adopting courtesy as a service standard, it places a responsibility on the organisation to recruit, hire and train a cast with great interpersonal skills. Cast is taught to shoulder a wide responsibility for guest's happiness through friendliness, knowing the answer to common questions, and when possible, guiding them personally to their destinations. Disney's philosophy is, "Guests may not always be right. But they are our guests".

3. Show
The service standard of show requires that there be seamless and exceptional entertainment for guests. Disney highlights to its cast members that jobs are performances, and uniforms are costumes. It all adds up to a seamless show.
4. Efficiency
A smooth operation of the theme parks and resorts is required. The company will need to understudy the guest flow and usage patterns to provide the proper equipment and staff levels. Prioritisation makes it clear to find solutions to problems. For example, the cast members know that putting the safety of a disabled guest is more important than the efficient loading process of guests, the continuity of the show and even courteous treatment of another guest.

Guestology

Disney adopts a slew of techniques to gather information from their guests. Among the techniques used are; face to face surveys conducted at the park gates and other main access points, creation of specific listening posts to answer to guests enquiries, comments cards, and using cast members to collect and report the opinions and observations of guests as a standard part of the their jobs. Usage and visitation patterns at the resort are also analysed and compared, mystery shoppers are employed to verify service in the resort's stores and gift shops, telephone surveys are used to develop information from both random population samples and recent guests, and focus groups are used to gather information for existing rides and attractions.

Casting

The employees at Disney World are called 'cast members', as each member begins their careers with Disney at the casting office, where auditions for prospective cast members are carried out.

Walt Disney World Guidelines for Guest Service

Make eye contact and smile.

Greet and welcome each and every guest.

- Extend the appropriate greeting to every guest with whom you come into contact – “Good morning/afternoon/evening; Welcome/Have a good day/May I help you?”
- Make the guests feel welcomed by providing a differentiated greeting in each area.

Seek out guest contact.

- It is the responsibility of every cast member to seek out guests who need help and assistance – Listen to the guest’s needs; Answer questions; Offer assistance (like taking family photographs).

Provide immediate service recovery.

- It is the responsibility of every cast member to attempt to the best of their ability, to immediately resolve a guest service failure before it becomes a guest service problem.
- Always find an answer for the guest or another cast member who can help the guest.

Display appropriate body language at all times.

- It is the responsibility of every cast member to display approachable body language when on stage – Attentive appearance; good posture; appropriate facial expression.

Preserve the magical guest experience.

- Always focus on the positive, rather than on rules and regulations.
- Talking about personal or job-related problems in front of guests is unacceptable.

Thank each and every guest.

- Extend every guest a sincere ‘thank you’ at the conclusion of every transaction.
- Extend every guest a thank you or similar expression of appreciation, if he/she leaves your area.

Source: Handbook on service excellence: A guide to service excellence in public management with lessons from best managed companies. (n.d.). Retrieved July 6, 2009, from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/CGG/UNPAN026214.pdf>

Delivery Systems

The Setting

Setting can deliver both physical and psychological aspect of service. Messages to their customers are built into the settings in which all organisations operate. The setting, in which a product is offered, “is communicating a great deal about the quality of the products and services customers can expect, as well as the price they are willing to pay”.

The internal structure of Walt Disney World’s park and its attractions draw the envy of urban planners. Artists and engineers employed to design most of the Walt Disney World are called “imagineers”. They create the attractions from inside out; starting with the show, sketching the theatre, and then the architecture itself. Disney believes that for a message regarding service quality to the customers to be believable, it must be supported. For example, even an overflowing trash basket or a dead plant can undercut the message.

Process

Processes comprise the “most prominent service delivery system in most organisations”. It often encompasses and utilise both settings and cast. Service processes in Walt Disney World include “moving guests through the attractions, the check-in and check-out processes at the resort’s hotels and the response to emergencies”. The service itself will seem simple and uncomplicated if a well-planned and well-executed system is in place.

Integration

Integration involves “combining each element of the cycle to create a complete operating system”. The integration matrix, which is a simple chart designed to track the distribution of service standards through delivery systems, can assist in guiding through the process of quality service analysis and improvement. The matrix can also be used to troubleshoot service problems, apart from benchmarking practices of other organisations.

Disney Vacation Club's Integration Matrix

	Cast	Setting	Process
Safety	Training in property-wise DVC safety techniques and policies.	First response features; safe materials, emergency access	Traffic flow, cast response; evacuation plans
Courtesy	Build long-term relationships; be passionate about product, use performance tips.	Umbrellas for guests, supervised playroom for children	One sales cast per member per guest; no hard-sell technique
Show	Sales as an onstage performance; performance training	Your home away from home; interior design; themed treats	Leave with a good taste in your mouth; sweets as last step
Efficiency	Provide critical purchase information up front	Setting supports efficient guest flow; quiet, private room for closing	Quality assurance team members at commitment

Source: Handbook on service excellence: A guide to service excellence in public management with lessons from best managed companies. (n.d.). Retrieved July 6, 2009, from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/CGG/UNPAN026214.pdf>

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Articles may be delivered to clients, upon request.

Books are available at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library.

Recommended Readings

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