

The International Customer Service Association (www.icsatoday.org) defines customer service as the *ability to satisfy customers' wants and needs to the best of your abilities while improving relationships and profits*. It should not be hard a statement to follow so why is it that a lot of customers are walking away from business interactions with a very bad taste in their mouths? A simple drive-through order at the local McDonald's takes forever to be fulfilled and your Big-Mac turns out to be a McChicken. The aisle seat you requested through the airline call center becomes the middle seat, in a row of 5, on your 10-hour transatlantic flight.

Why is it happening with an alarming frequency? When did good customer service become an exception? I attribute the current state of affairs to the *myth of common sense*. Imagine the following situation: you are in a coffee shop waiting to get your morning latte, courtesy of a gift card you got at the office, and when you get to the cashier the server loudly exclaims, "oh my, another coupon-kind of customer". As you try to hide your embarrassment and quietly move to the side, the server carries on his duties completely oblivious of the impact his statement had on you and all the other customers waiting in line.

Most managers would say the employee did not use "sound judgment" or that he "did not have good common sense". The Webster's dictionary defines common sense as *sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts*. But if perception is incredibly variable from one person to another, then customer service will also vary depending on the individual delivering it. Poor customer service has nothing to do with common sense; it invariably happens for 2 reasons:

- The service provider has not been trained to provide service from the customer's point of view
- The service provider knows how to provide good service but is unwilling to do so

Then what is customer service and how can an organization deliver it? It all starts with a commitment to put the customer first, at the center of every decision. It's about improving the customer experience in every interaction. It's not cheap and it involves creating a motivating environment where employees can enjoy and employ the 4 C's:

- ✓ Employees are well trained and competent
- ✓ Employees feel confident in their abilities
- ✓ Employees feel connected to the company
- ✓ Employees who do well are celebrated (rewarded) for their efforts

The above will ensure consistency on how service is delivered and consistency is the starting point to good customer service. It is time to stop relying on common sense, take ownership and accountability for delivering great service, and remember that without customers there is NO service, good or bad...