



GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

HELPING OWNERS AND MANAGERS TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST INSIGHTS AND EXPERT ADVICE

Providing great customer service is important to all businesses. And in the hospitality industry it is the lifeblood that keeps a venue thriving.

Promotions, gaming, events and marketing all drive visits and bring in new patrons, but unless visitors want to return again and again, the business will struggle to remain competitive.

Pubs and clubs are subject to the greatest scrutiny from their patrons and your role as service provider is to keep your patrons happy and satisfied.

It isn't complicated to get your customers to come back. You just need to provide really great customer service. **The kind that makes your patrons feel special, exceeds their expectations and makes your competitors look like they aren't trying very hard.**

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INTRODUCTION

AIMING FOR GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

Send customers away happy and they will talk about their experience to others. They will be advocates for your venue and recommend you to their friends, perhaps bringing them to enjoy the same great experience.

It is not enough to have a polite 'please' and 'thankyou' and a brief smile from the staff. Great customer service is created when you keep a genuine focus on delighting your customers.

It is more than just working on a great looking venue and fantastic Food & Beverage offer. It is about the cumulative experience that patrons have when they visit your venue. How they are welcomed, attended to and how their concerns dealt with.

Patrons are looking for a memorable experience and seamless service where it most affects them. From being welcomed in, receiving quick service and even being

given special treatment such as a customized menu item or sampling a new drink, patrons want to feel they are appreciated and deserve a little special attention once in a while.

Customers will rate you highly when you can deliver a service that anticipates their needs and consistently deliver such service levels.

This is only possible when your own internal culture, training and service model is focused on excellence.

In this guide, we feature the expert insights of Mary O'Neill and her refreshing ideas for all venues to improve customer service from the inside out.

After our interview, we discuss some of Mary's strategies in more detail and see how just a few simple changes can make the world of difference to your business.

“The ultimate aim of great customer service is to ensure the customer comes back.”





“My passion is working with people. Many years of experience in this industry allows me to work with venue staff and have them open up to me, so together we can address their issues and build personal pride in their abilities. My mission is to empower staff to be responsible for their actions, work closely with each other and to understand that the customer pays their wage.”

Mary O'Neill is the Director of Mary O' Corporate Services, an organization dedicated to working with staff on issues that affect their ability to provide excellence in customer service.

Her insightful and pragmatic approach results in better attention to detail on the delivery of food, beverage and customer care. Each project addresses different concerns as per the client's brief but her philosophy remains the same “If better is possible, than good is not enough”.

Mary believes that it is the staff that run the business and they can be responsible for increasing customer visits and business, or for losing patrons and their

goodwill, all without the management team being aware of what is happening until it is too late.

Mary's impressive background successfully looking after customers within Ansett Airlines, Ansett Golden Wing and 30 years in the gaming industry means that she walks the walk. She delivers insights and experience to her clients that make a tangible and lasting difference. Her sessions drive the change required to ensure that staff are close to the customers in a personal and caring way.

For more information or a confidential chat, you can contact Mary O'Neill on:

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY O'NEILL

IGT spoke to Mary O'Neill about what pubs and clubs should prioritise to improve their customer service?

Mary believes you must always start with your own people. Get that right and great customer service mostly follows.

When it comes to great customer service, what do venues do well?

Pubs and clubs have done a great job of ensuring that patrons have a fantastic environment to be in. In the last few years, most venues have devoted time and money to creating luxurious environments, beautiful furniture and fittings and access to choices of food and drink that were once only accessible in very expensive establishments. Many local clubs have also been successful in creating a sense of ownership and belonging for their patrons, because they have focused on creating and sustaining a community.

The 'build it and they will come' philosophy has driven a very high standard in the majority of venues and Australians can now enjoy and expect some of the most sumptuous lounges, bars and restaurants right in their local pub and club.

What can go wrong in a venue?

It is short sighted to assume that just because you have built the most beautiful venue, it will always be full.

And it is wrong to assume that just because your staff get regular training, that you are providing good customer service.

Good customer service is something that a business should constantly work on. Customer service is the result of a transaction between people. The individuals in every transaction are constantly changing, whether it be the staff or the patrons, so there are many types of interactions between many combinations of different people that all need to result in satisfaction rather than ill-feeling from either side. Why should any business believe that this is something that will take care of itself?

If a venue does not take full responsibility for creating and leading a positive, helpful and customer focused culture, the void is filled by staff who may choose a negative attitude because of a lack of leadership and support. Staff often disregard the policy and procedures required to deliver a consistent standard of service.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY O'NEILL...cont'd.

“If better is possible, than good is not enough.”

Different cultures and sub cultures start to exist under the radar. The ‘them and us’ thinking that drives the negative belief that management are always wrong and don’t understand what the frontline staff do. The blame culture that stems from a lack of communication and teamwork. None of it helps to keep the customers coming back.

These sub cultures affect staff engagement, commitment and importantly, how much they enjoy their job. In turn, it leads to poor teamwork which in turn leads to poor customer service. It is incumbent on the management team to motivate and instil confidence in their staff and build a strong ethos of working together, before looking to blame anybody about unhappy patrons.

WHY IS TEAMWORK SO IMPORTANT?

Because most problems stem from a lack of teamwork.

Staff who do not take any responsibility for each other, take little responsibility for their own work. They blame the management, the roster or the rush of customers for not being able to attend to patrons or keep an area clean.

The fact is that there will always be moments when the bar is short-staffed, there are more empty glasses, dirty plates and ashtrays than expected or larger queues than can be served quickly. But while the single barman is being run ragged on his own, you can guarantee that there are groups of staff elsewhere, standing around having a chat.

A proactive and functional team takes responsibility for all work, whether it is their direct responsibility or not. Functional team members pick up ashtrays and straighten chairs as they go, and jump in to help out when queues build up.

But most importantly, functional teams are happy.

For the last seven years, I have carried out research with each group and each venue I have worked with and now that I have enough data, I would like to share the outcome from a significant sample:

WITHOUT FAIL, 100% OF PEOPLE ARE HAPPY AT WORK, WHEN EVERYBODY PULLS TOGETHER.

EQUALLY 100% OF PEOPLE ARE UNHAPPY AT WORK WHEN OTHERS SLACK OFF.



“A proactive and functional team takes responsibility for all work, whether it is their direct responsibility or not.”

This is an incredible statistic that demonstrates just how important a good team-working culture is. Unfortunately, of the groups I have surveyed, 80% of people don't feel they work as a team and more worryingly still, 60% of staff say they are unhappy.

The statistics show that people do want to work hard and feel part of a like-minded group. They are happy to work towards being better if it will improve the situation. A final insight into how motivated staff really are on the whole is that when asking those that have been counselled by management how they feel, 98% feel embarrassed and/or keen to do better. Not negative that they have been singled out or treated unfairly.

Staff don't get up in the morning and decide to do a really bad job at work. They may just need more motivation and enthusiasm from their line managers to set the right attitude for their shift.

HOW CAN TRAINING HELP?

Training can turn even the most dysfunctional staff members into a high performing team.

However, it has to be the right kind of training. Service training is available for a wide variety of jobs and duties in the hospitality industry and many venues carry out their own. Staff receive instruction on how to properly serve food and beverages, direction on how to work a front desk, processes for till management and the many numerous roles and processes required to run a venue efficiently.

Sometimes the training is being done by the same people for years, who may inadvertently be passing on outdated

ideas and methods that do not help to build the current culture. Training methods and ideas need regular review and alignment with the developing company culture.

Service level training doesn't always address the behaviours that we need all staff to replicate in order to achieve a high quality of customer experience. Staff who have the responsibility of training new staff need to deliver a positive message and have pride in their venue. Some training staff deliver a negative message concerning some managers, other staff and even customers. We simply assume that everybody knows that they must smile, be open and helpful, make eye contact, how to address a customer or what to say in certain circumstances. The biggest mistake that organisations make is to assume that the people who are in front line roles are confident and happy dealing with customers.

Over the years, I have developed five areas that I consider are the most critical and are rarely addressed in other types of training. I call these the five Cs.

Confidence

The stark reality is that many people working in pubs and clubs are not very confident in themselves or how to deal with other people. Many behaviours arise in an attempt to avoid talking to or being in confrontation with others, whether it be colleagues or customers. Working with staff on their confidence allows them to have empathy for customers and how they may react to a negative situation, giving them the knowledge and skills to take control, calm a customer down and solve the problem to create a positive environment.



AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY O'NEILL...cont'd.

Consistency

When you deliver what you promise, customers return for more. Conversely, when you attract patrons on a great big promise and then fail to deliver, you will create disappointment and a negative perception which is hard to change. Consistency is also achieved with staff behaviour and standards that are worked towards always.

Even if there are lots of patrons wanting attention, two staff members can deliver two different attitudes, one a positive and one a negative. It is most important that all staff are consistent in delivering the same positive service attitude. If not, the business will lose and not know until it is too late. Staff need to understand that their negative attitude will result in not only loss of customers but could result in loss of shifts for staff. Unhappy customers will not return. It is most important that consistently high service levels should be the number one priority.

Compromise

This is a tricky skill but oh so important in an ever changing environment. Skills are often taught relating to what happens in an ideal setting. But when that setting is not 'text book', many staff often don't know how to behave. The 'rules are rules' attitude is not helpful when something does not go according to plan. I work with teams to ensure they know when and how to compromise, with each other and with customers, to ensure everybody feels that their needs have been met. Too often, because of the culture that exists, staff will advise other staff, "it's not my job" and effectively stop any teamwork that previously existed. Staff members who can compromise with each other and customers are able to deliver consistently high standards of service.

Connect (with each other and management)

It's important to make sure all employees, not just customer facing staff, understand the way they should talk to, interact with and problem solve for internal and external customers. Customer service is a top-down endeavour, so train the management team according to the standards you want to achieve across the venue.

This ensures that everybody is aiming for the same standard and cuts through the 'them and us' attitude that is so prevalent across the staff hierarchy in many venues. It also diffuses the blame culture if everybody is being involved in the development of people skills. It is not just the frontline staff that has to 'do better', it is everybody from the CEO down.

This creates a team culture where all levels of staff know each other, have trained together, speak with respect and courtesy and have the same objectives with regard to behaviours and customer service.

Communication

Lack of communication is the main reason for unhappiness. When work gets busy or information is not channelled through to frontline staff, it is a natural human reaction to grit ones teeth and just put up with it.

Staff often get cranky with each other because they don't feel supported. They may have too much work or are not made aware of a function or promotion and they can feel like the management simply doesn't back them up.

Engendering a culture that does not tolerate blame but looks for solutions and encourages teams to talk openly, means that problems can be addressed quickly and openly.

It is not sufficient to state that staff should speak up and ask for help when necessary. If the staff feel they will be penalized for it, they won't do it. Open communication needs to be led from the top and there must be a belief that it is OK to ask for help, or tell somebody that you have too much work and can't cope.

FINALLY, WHAT TOP THREE THINGS WOULD YOU ADVISE VENUES TO PAY ATTENTION TO?

Objectives & goal setting

It is vital that we set goals for the staff that are clearly defined and can be measured. The aim is to increase revenue and market share. What we need to achieve this includes customer retention, winning new customers, departments supporting each other with information and clear and concise communication and most importantly achieving more frequent visits to the club. This results in building long term and loyal relationships.

Monitor results and staff

You can analyse your customers' experiences through the use of feedback cards and online surveys. This will give you a volume of feedback that indicates what you are getting right and what you can improve. Using "secret shoppers" and creating customer advisory groups that meet periodically to evaluate service standards, will give you the in-depth information to know exactly what you can change or improve. However, the simplest and most effective way to monitor results is by the number of compliments and complaints received each day.



“Most importantly, give every member of your staff enough information and power to make those small customer-pleasing decisions, so they can get to YES where possible.”

Businesses should work on eliminating the complaints and increasing the compliments.

It is important to say that while businesses should make every effort to train and motivate staff, sometimes there is simply a bad fit with the organization and culture. Don't be afraid to identify and release staff that don't fit. As stated in the research, the amount of ill-feeling that is created by people who can't or won't pull their own weight is hugely detrimental to the business. Cut them out and move on. The rest of the staff will be much happier as a result.

Plan for problems and train everybody to handle them effectively

It is often said that you shouldn't plan to fail. That is nonsense. When we are not prepared for when things go wrong (and they always do), they usually escalate until they are a serious problem.

Customer service problems usually involve emotions on both sides, so remaining courteous and respectful throughout, helps to diffuse stressful situations.

Always apologise, even if you think the customer is wrong. You don't have to accept the premise that they are right, but you can be sorry that they are unhappy about it.

Deal with problems immediately and let customers know what you have done. It's important to respond quickly to all enquiries, even if it is only to say you are looking into the issue and will be back in touch. Some response is always better than none so the customer doesn't feel ignored.

Make it simple for customers to complain. Value their complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve. Even if customers are having a bad day, go out of your way to make them feel it is OK for them to complain.

Most importantly, give every member of your staff enough information and power to make those small customer-pleasing decisions, so they can get to YES where possible.

Mary O'Neill lives customer service, it is in her DNA. Over the years, she has seen many venues turn around their businesses by focussing on the staff and believes too many organisations fail to understand that happy and engaged staff keep the customers coming back.

WE LOOK AT WHAT IT TAKES TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND KEEP PATRONS COMING BACK

Great customer service starts with really getting to know your customers.

Then you must decide on the sort of culture that will create a great customer service experience.

Finally, you must lead that culture through every level of the organization to ensure your service is seamless and consistent throughout.

1. GET TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

If you run a club or pub, you are in the business to service customer needs and you can only do that if you know what they like and how you can delight them on occasion.

Take an objective look: Everybody should spend some time at the front desk or hang out in the lobby to observe the sort of interactions that happen at different times of the day and week. Are the staff friendly and helpful or disinterested and occupied? Are the patrons happy, friendly, rude or aggressive? This is invaluable insight so you can target the specific areas that need improvement.

Talk to and then listen to your customers: Remember that it costs a lot more to win a new customer than to retain a current one. Five times more in fact. So take the time to identify their needs, their preferences and what really upsets them. Can you name what three things are most important to your customers?

You can run a regular survey or make it part of your online or offline communications with your customers. This approach gives you a lot of responses to just a few simple questions. It will give you a good steer on what you are doing right and where you need to concentrate more effort.

For in depth information, you can carry out focus groups or one to one chats with a handful of customers. Listen to their words, tone of voice, body language, and most importantly, how they feel. Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve.

Do something with the feedback: Use the feedback to make it useful in your customer service process and ensure that those that gave you feedback, know their time was well spent. Ask for and review feedback regularly, identify areas for improvement, communicate the strategy internally and make specific changes in the business.



2. WORK HARD AT LEADERSHIP

Every business leader expects their staff to demonstrate exemplary behaviour, but many behave in a far from exemplary manner themselves.

We have come a long way since the days of the autocratic CEO and the employees that simply did as they were told. We now understand that employees have great ideas too and that they should be heard and involved. And that we must always be looking for the next great idea to drive innovation and change.

Good leadership is more than simply embracing the new and different. Knowing when to stop listening to great ideas and start acting on them creates a compelling and unifying vision for the venue that will drive the strategy and plans to achieve it.

It sounds simple but to commit to a direction and chart a solid course forward takes research, processes, structure and discipline. And a lot of bravery. It takes nerve to solidly stand behind a corporate vision and a defined organizational culture. Leading a business is about having a clear vision and taking everybody on the journey with you to see it through.

It is the leader at the front who makes the greatest impact on the productivity of the business. In 2007, a joint LSE & McKinsey study highlighted that productivity increases associated with improved leadership practices are much larger than investment in either Capital or Labour. Management Matters in Australia carried out a follow up study in November 2009, focusing on the need for better management practices in Australian medium sized organisations.

Driving change in your organisation may be difficult, but driving change in yourself is much harder. It is uncomfortable, confronting and downright scary. Being an inspiration to others takes a structured and planned approach, discipline and a lot of energy. And it is worth every minute to you and your business and those that will follow you.

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3. MOTIVATE AND ENGAGE STAFF

People hate to do a bad job at work or disappoint their colleagues and boss. If you believe that people wilfully fail to deliver, then you need to understand a bit more about what drives people at work and in life, for they are the same thing.

Meeting expectations generates an increase in dopamine levels in the brain. It is our reward. But, the ever increasing to-do list, not knowing a manager's expectations or how to deal with a difficult situation at work, all create a moving goalpost that increases uncertainty and makes expectations harder to meet.

Leaders and Managers can change staff behaviour by reinforcing good outcomes and building people's confidence with positive feedback. When a job has not been delivered as expected, sharing your disappointment is the least constructive way to get what you want. Praise, positive feedback and understanding that there are competing priorities will be more productive than threatening ultimatums.

We all know that when we work with somebody who makes us feel better about ourselves, communicates clear expectations, lets us make decisions, trusts us and is fair, we will work harder for them as we feel intrinsically rewarded by the relationship itself. Spending time around a leader like this turbo charges motivation.

4. CREATE A CULTURE THAT PROMOTES POSITIVITY

Staff treat customers the way they are treated. They take their cue from the management, so if you turn up late for meetings because they are just internal, actively avoid staff by taking the long way round, do not greet them enthusiastically every day or you are abrupt, then that is the standard you are setting.

Treat employees with respect however and they will have a higher regard for customers.

- > Have a recognition system that is peer based, with a customer service benchmark so the staff can vote on who provides the best service each month.
- > Promote friendliness. Customer service begins with a smile. Customers feel warmly greeted and you set a positive tone for the interaction, even if they don't smile back and are determined to be miserable.
- > Encourage staff to be helpful, even if there's no immediate profit in it. Book a taxi, follow up an enquiry, and give away a coffee once in a while. It costs little but leaves a lasting impression.
- > Make sure the staff say thank you after every transaction. It is one of the easiest ways to start a habit of good customer service.

THE INSTANT EXPERT SERIES

When it comes to gaming, IGT understands that each venue has different requirements in relation to game choice, machine requirements, system needs and service support. That is why IGT takes the time to build a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership with its customers to ensure that it provides a total gaming solution offering:

- > Innovative games and gaming machines
- > Professional support and service
- > Gaming management systems

IGT has a strong affiliation with local industry associations in the club, pub/hotel and casino markets to ensure that it keeps abreast of the gaming issues and needs of each sector. This knowledge teamed with IGT's global strength and extensive experience within the gaming industry means that IGT can provide the best gaming solutions for your venue.

To find out more, please call us on +61 (0) 2 8345 3000 or visit:
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