

## **If Everybody Knows Excellent Service is Important, Why Isn't It Better?**

by

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Think back over your last week, chances are you can recall at least one and probably several instances when you as the consumer were disappointed, frustrated, or appalled at the level of service you received. The importance of excellent service is touted everywhere, so why do we run into poor service as often as we do?

Service is often less than the best in organizations for three reasons: (1) No service strategy exists (2) Employees aren't rewarded for giving great service, and (3) Leaders don't lead the way.

### **Creating A Service Strategy**

Hiring people and merely telling them to give great service without defining what that means in your credit union is like giving people instruments they don't know how to play, putting them in the orchestra, and telling them to play beautiful music. Even with the best intentions, they won't be able to produce excellence-- no matter how hard they try. But take individually skilled people, give them a specific musical piece to play, show them how to blend their talents into one beautiful sound, and then watch excellence in action.

Excellence in action is what a service strategy is all about. A service strategy spells out what excellent service means in your credit union. It clarifies expectations, sets standards, creates unity, guides behavior, and inspires people. It is concise, memorable, and powerful. A service strategy moves excellent service from a nebulous concept into a useful framework for action. A service strategy is useful in recruiting the right people, training them, assessing their performance, and rewarding them. When people know what they are to do, have the skills to do it, and work together great things happen. A service strategy can help make great service a part of "business as usual" at your credit union.

### **Rewarding People for Giving Great Service**

A basic principle of human behavior is this: people do what they are rewarded for doing. Making employees feel important—rewarding them for being employees and serving members well is as important as making members feel important—rewarding them for being members and doing business with you.

Providing excellent service is hard work. It involves communicating clearly, solving problems, attending to the emotional needs of customers, and making your systems work on behalf of members. Employees who move beyond the everyday “task mentality” to this “service mentality” deserve to be rewarded. Are you giving your employees the standing ovation they deserve?

When rewarding employees for service excellence, keep three reward guidelines in mind: give rewards that have to do with the work itself, focus on intrinsic rewards more than extrinsic, and make the rewards visible, regular, and valuable.

Rewards that make your employees’ jobs easier, more comfortable, or more enjoyable encourage them to continue providing good service. Intrinsic rewards motivate them in a way extrinsic rewards can’t--by tapping into their needs for achievement and recognition. Your reward system needs to be as well thought out and implemented as your other business systems.

### **Leading by Example**

Just as great orchestras have great conductors so do great credit unions have great leaders--leaders who understand service excellence, serve their own people, provide them with resources, and empower them. Service oriented leaders build service thinking and behaviors into every nook and cranny of their credit union.

They do this by inspiring their people with a compelling vision of service excellence, by demonstrating outstanding service behaviors themselves, and by ensuring organizational systems enable employees to provide high levels of service. How often have you heard employees say “They won’t let me do that”? The infamous “they” is usually the unknown, unseen, unsupportive leaders whose policies, practices, and procedures get in the way of serving members. Giving employees responsibility for giving great service without authority to do so is like tying one hand behind their backs and telling them to golf well. Employees must have the freedom to serve: to make decisions, solve problems, and “wow” your members.

Poor service stems from three sources: no service strategy, lack of rewards for serving well, and inadequate service leadership. To be exceptional, you must live your service strategy, reward service excellence, and demonstrate service leadership. Excellent service doesn’t just happen; it is planned, rewarded, and modeled.