



By Mac McIntire

How to Achieve Consistent Quality and Service Delivery at Every Level of Your Organization

Successful companies know how to get their employees to do the right things right for the right reasons at the right time, each and every time.

Here's the good news: Your customers *want* to do business with you. If they didn't, they'd probably go somewhere else. The bad news is your customers *will* go somewhere else if you fail to consistently deliver on your quality and service promises.

When a customer patronizes your business for the first time he takes a risk. He doesn't know if your products will be good. He *hopes* your service delivery will be pleasant, but he hasn't no assurance that he will have a quality experience with your company.

That first experience – and every subsequent experience thereafter – determines whether the customer will be loyal to your business. If the customer's requirements are met satisfactorily on the first visit, most likely he will patronize your business again. But, if his needs are not met, many customers won't give you a second chance.

Consistent Service is Key to Customer Loyalty

The key to repeat business is consistency in both what you offer and how you deliver it. Customers will be loyal and return again and again when they have confidence in your products and services. They will come back when they trust they will have a consistent experience each and every time they patronize your business. The strength of customer loyalty is in direct proportion to the confidence they feel regarding how well you will consistently deliver on your service promise.

The companies that are most successful are those that know how to do the right things right each and every time. And their customers know they do it. Customers at McDonald's restaurants, for example, repeatedly return to the company's franchises because they know their Big Mac will taste the same every time, regardless of which outlet they visit, when they visit, or who is preparing their meal. Consistency is the key to McDonald's success.

Several years ago I developed a simple blueprint that shows how your company can create consistent quality service throughout your entire organization. I call my formula the *Consistent Service Model*® (see graphic on page 3).

Determining What Your Customers Want

Consistency starts with knowing why your company, or department, or job classification exists. It begins with pinpointing the “products” or “services” your customers actually want to buy and the intrinsic reason(s) why they buy them. Consistent service delivery entails having a clear view of your products and services from your *customers'* perspective. It involves knowing the true needs, wants, expectations and requirements of your target customers.

Therefore, the first step in the *Consistent Service Model* is the development of a [Product Description](#).

A product description describes what “products” your customers want. It states why your business “exists” from the customers' point of view. The clear articulation of your product description helps you deliver your products and services according to the customers' requirements as *they* perceive those requirements, not to some standard or specification that you or your company may arbitrarily establish.

The key to success in business is giving your customers what they want as *they* want it. If your company fails to deliver your products or services according to your customers' expectations, you could find your enterprise going out of existence as your customers defect to competitors who *are* giving them what they want.

Implied Promises

A product description very succinctly defines the *Implied Promises* inherent in your products and services. Implied promises are assurances already inherent in your products and services

For example, customers who patronize a fast food restaurant want *fast* food. They want their fast food to be *hot* and *fresh*. They also expect their order to be filled *accurately*. Fast food restaurants who deliver a quality food product fast, hot, fresh and accurately will have a significant competitive advantage over restaurants who don't meet these customer requirements.

Similarly, a person who buys a power tool wants it to work -- they want it to be *reliable*. They also expect it to work for a long time – they want the tool to be *durable*. They want the tool to be *easy to use* and to *perform the functions it is designed to perform at the level promised*. Finally, since it is a power tool, they expect the tool to be *safe*.

Tool manufacturers who produce reliable, durable, safe and easy to use power tools that perform the function they are designed to perform at the level promised will win in the market over competing manufacturers who fail to deliver on these implied promises.

As can be seen by these examples, consistent delivery on the implied promises is the real “product” customers want to buy. Nothing infuriates customers more than to think they are buying one thing – fast food – only to discover too late they are getting something else.

Know What You're Selling

The best product descriptions are those that clearly identify what a company is selling. This is not as obvious as it may seem. Many hotel owners, for example, think they are selling *rooms*. Consequently, they build as many rooms as they can as cheaply as they can by having thinner walls between the rooms. They then try to create a high profit margin by filling their thin-walled rooms with a high volume of guests.

The best hotels – the ones that create the greatest customer loyalty – are the hotels who realize the product they are actually selling is *sleep*. Hotel patrons go to a hotel to sleep. Hotels who sell sleep design their facility to ensure nothing disrupts their customers’ sleep. Thin walls mean noise, and noise means sleepless nights. Hotel guests who can’t sleep usually do not repeat the experience. They go to a hotel where they know they can get a good night’s sleep. Hotels who sell sleep consistently outperform those who just sell rooms.

This is the reason why I call the first step in the consistency model a *Product Description*, rather than a purpose statement or some other descriptor. Every employee in every company is selling something. Every employee in every company has customers – either external or internal – who “buy” that person’s products or services. Their customers either buy what the employee is selling or they don’t. If the worker’s customers are not satisfied with the quality of their products or the delivery of their service, the customers eventually go to someone else who does give them what they want. And, if too many customers defect, the employee may soon find his or her position being eliminated.

Let me give you some examples.

A potwasher in a restaurant sells clean, sterile pots that are free of crusty food, grease and grime. The chefs and cooks – the potwasher’s customers – either “buy” the pots from the potwasher or they don’t. Any pots not cleaned to the chef’s satisfaction are returned to the potwasher until they meet the chef’s requirements. Additionally, the potwasher must place the pots where the chef wants them, not wherever the potwasher wishes. The potwasher must cheerfully wash the pots no matter how many times the cook gets them dirty. If the potwasher continues to fail to clean the pots to the chef’s satisfaction in the manner the chef requires, the potwasher may soon find he or she is no longer employed as a potwasher.

The Accounting Department also is selling a product. Accountants sell fast, accurate financial information from which to make sound business decisions. A PBX phone operator is selling company information and accurately routed phone calls in a fast, friendly and courteous manner. Customers who take their vehicles to a car dealership for repairs hope the mechanics can quickly and accurately diagnose and fix the car’s maintenance problem at the lowest possible cost.

Each of these examples show what the customers want to buy. If the “product” is not delivered the way the customers expect, the customers will buy these services from someone who knows why they exist and sells what customers want to buy.

Determining true customer expectations requires you to look beyond the obvious to the intangibles that are desired. Hotel customers, for example, aren’t just buying a room. What hotel customers really want is a clean, safe, quiet, and comfortable room where everything works properly so they can sleep through the night. Hotels who fail to consistently provide all five components when selling their rooms may soon find themselves short of customers as customers migrate to competing hotels who consistently meet their requirements.

A product description is a succinct statement of the core customer requirements, or the basic “promises,” you must deliver every time. Far too many companies fail to get the basics right. Those who continue to fail at providing the basics may find the very existence of their business threatened.

Delivering What Your Customers Want

Once you know what your customers really want and *must* have to be fully satisfied with your products and services, the next step is to “guarantee” you will deliver that each and every time.

The second step in the *Consistent Service Model* is defining your **Service Guarantees**. Service guarantees are clearly articulated internal measurements you must achieve to consistently meet your customers' expectations. Service guarantees quantify your product description. If you fail to deliver at any time on your *Implied Promises* customers will lose trust and confidence in your delivery and will go somewhere else. Again, trust and confidence create loyal customers. Therefore, you must ensure, or guarantee, that proper delivery on the core requirements happens each and every time by each and every employee.

Service guarantees typically are determined from your product description. They are the critical quality and service standards you must consistently achieve in order to fulfill your product description.

For example, the service guarantees that hotel customers want are relatively clear. Hotel patrons want a clean, safe, quiet, comfortable, and fully-functional room. They want it *every time*. If the room is not clean even once, or the room is robbed once, or the lights don't work one time; the customers will lose confidence in the hotel. They will seek competitors who they feel better "guarantee" the cleanliness, safety, quietness, comfort, and functionality they require in a hotel room.

Service guarantees are the measurable standards you set to ensure your employees deliver a consistent product. They are the critical indicators of whether your employees are winning or losing. Service guarantees are the scorecard and measurement of your success.

Service Guarantees are *not* published guarantees you advertise to your customers; although you could advertise them if you felt your service guarantees offered a competitive advantage. Rather, service guarantees are clearly articulated internal performance standards that every

employee knows they must achieve in order to satisfy your customers. They are the means by which you communicate to your employees what is important. They define what it takes to win in measurable terms. They are the crucial goals that must be reached to guarantee your existence, or to achieve your product description. They are what every employee consciously strives to produce every moment of their workday. In short, the service guarantees are the tangible indicators of whether your employees are fulfilling their reason for existing in the company.

Anyone who has stayed in the same hotel room for several days in a row no doubt has experienced inconsistent cleanliness in their room. Some days the room just seems to be cleaner than others. This usually occurs because a different person cleaned the room. The new person had a different way of doing it. They did it their own way, resulting in inconsistent service.

Customers usually don't care *who* cleans their room or who provides the service; they just want the experience to be the same every time. No one wants to go to a restaurant and first have to ask who the cook is that day in order to know how to order their steak. They want rare, medium, or well-done to

be the same each time they patronize the restaurant regardless of who is in the kitchen.



Ensuring Consistency in Day-to-Day Operations

The only way you can "guarantee" your products and service delivery will be the same each time is by ensuring all of your employees maintain the same **Standards**, abide by the same **Policies** and **Procedures**, and use the same **Processes, Practices** and **Systems** to perform their jobs at the desired level. If one housekeeper uses one procedure or process to clean a hotel room, and another has a

different procedure or process, the room may be cleaned inconsistently. Standards, policies, procedures, processes, practices and systems are put in place as a means to replicate the specific performance and experience expected by your customers. If employees fail to follow those guidelines, it's impossible to guarantee the results will be consistent. Consistent enforcement of the defined procedures and processes is the key to consistent service. Your employees need to realize the importance of performing their work and following the policies, procedures, processes and practices exactly as designed. And they must commit to do so each and every time.

Once you know the standards, policies, procedures, processes, practices and systems necessary to deliver on the implied promises, the next step is to train your staff to faithfully abide by them. The most effective **Training**, therefore, is training that is targeted specifically to instruct employees on the standards, policies, procedures, processes, practices and systems necessary to guarantee their existence. The only training that has real, lasting value is that which is linked to the employees' product description, service guarantees, and the tasks they must carry out to meet the customers' specific requirements.

Companies should focus their training around why the employees' job classifications exist (*product description*) and what they must do to ensure their existence (*service guarantees*). Training should teach the employees how to consistently perform their tasks according to the standards, policies, procedures, processes, practices and systems that have been specifically designed to meet the customers' requirements. Companies who invest their training dollars in such a targeted approach will reap a return of consistent performance and strong customer loyalty.

The final step in the *Consistent Service Model* is the certifying that all of your employees are maintaining the same standards and exactly following the procedures you purposely have mapped out to achieve your guaranteed results.

Certification is the means by which you attest that every employee knows exactly how to do their job and, in fact, is doing it as designed. You certify that no matter *when* a customer uses your products and no matter *who* performs the service, the customer will experience the same quality service each time.

The only way you can certify that this will be true is if you measure, monitor and manage the performance of the employees to ensure they are doing it as they were trained. Employees who, for some reason, are not performing their tasks as trained must be *decertified* and coached, or

retrained, until their performance returns to the specified level. Too often employees fail to perform the way they were trained. Regular, on-going certification is the capstone of the *Consistent Service Model*.

Business leaders who help their employees identify why they exist, and then do everything possible to guarantee that existence, will find they have created both loyal customers and loyal employees. §

Innovative Management Group provides consulting and training on the *Consistent Service Model*®. We help you design and implement the standards, policies, procedures, processes, practices and systems necessary to ensure consistent quality and service delivery within every department and from every employee at every level of your organization. We also train your managers and employees so they can deliver on the *implied promises* each and every time. We certify that our model will achieve the quality and service levels that will ensure your company succeeds in today's competitive markets.

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