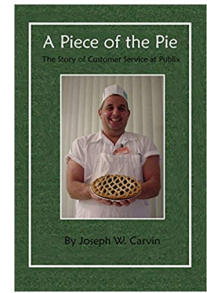


A Piece of the Pie; The Story of Customer Service at Publix

Joseph W. Carvin (2005)

Notes by Bob Evely
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2019.



Noting the 75-year anniversary of Publix, CEO Charlie Jenkins, Jr. summarizes the company's history as "doing our best to make Publix *a place where shopping is a pleasure.*"

This book is filled with real-life stories of customer service in action. Together the stories display a company culture that is responsible for the great success of Publix. My notes will not document any of these stories but will simply present some of the "formula" and principles that have been molded into the culture, and that have led to the many stories. Pick up this book for yourself after reviewing my notes, and experience for yourself the company culture in action.

The goal ... (p. 21)

"Exceeding the customer's expectations."

The customer's shopping experience (p. 24)

By adopting the self-service model and aiming at high volume (as competitors had done), Jenkins too could drive prices down. But as important as product and price were, nothing, in the end, was as important as the customer's shopping experience.

Jenkins, while on a trip to New York, observed electric eye door openers – and had them installed at this store. He added an air conditioning system when it was relatively new. He worked on brightening displays, fluorescent lighting, having his own parking lot – when all of these things were novel.

As much as he recognized the benefits of mass merchandising, Jenkins worried that if a customer left to select groceries on their own he might quickly lose personal contact – a person-to-person relationship with the customer.

The slogan ... (p. 25)

"Where shopping is a pleasure."

Honesty / Hiring (p. 26)

Employee honesty and integrity is a top priority at Publix. When selecting people to hire, integrity, morals, and honesty would be the top qualifications.

Turning disappointment to delight (p. 31)

Working on customer disappointments has nothing to do with concepts like "fault" or "blame." It's about making the customer feel good. "We never want our customers to leave our stores disappointed for any reason."

Former president Mark Hollis said that his job was to "make the situation feel right" for the customer. (p. 46)

Individuals make a difference (p. 35)

Another of Mr. George [Jenkin's] sayings: "Publix will be a little better place, or not quite as good; because of you." As large as Publix had become, just one associate was still important enough to make a difference."

The ordinary (p. 40)

An essential part of *superior* customer service is the willingness to step up, to take the initiative, to do something *out of the ordinary*.

Relationships (p. 55)

Commenting on automation (the new scanning technology in the checkout aisle), Jenkins observed, “The personal contact with the customer will not be lessened any with all this automation. It’s about treating customers and associates as individuals. As long as we take care of each other and the customer, and do right by each other, we’ll make a little money along the way.”

Jim Rhodes summed up what the founder taught him by saying, “We’re in the *relationship* business.”

Friendly and sincere (p. 85)

Anyone can learn about the supermarket business. But it takes special talent to be genuine and sincerely helpful to customers. You can’t fake friendly and sincere customer service.

Tending to culture (p. 128)

Publix does a great job of training its associates on standards of service. In the food war we are in, the last survivors to stand will be the ones with the best-trained associates.

The formal training developed at Publix is excellent. But the vast majority of the “training” given to Publix associates comes from on-the-job mentoring that new associates get from other associates in the store. They demonstrate behaviors, setting examples. And they tell stories.

All Publix associates are skilled; not unskilled. They are example-setters, story-tellers, and culture-builders. (p. 150)

Taking ownership (p. 131)

A disappointed shopper reported their positive experience when making a complaint; “I went to the customer care counter and expressed some disappointment, and he immediately took charge of the situation.”

Pride (p. 155)

Despite the fact that an item being returned by a customer was, in fact, a competitor’s item, the associate provided a free replacement; whereupon the customer reported that they were now a Publix customer for life.

Another customer approached the associate, having witnessed what had just happened. They stated, “Publix didn’t just gain a customer for life. It gained two.”

The recipe (p. 164)

Hire people who have the *desire* to serve customers.

Recognize the difference between satisfying customers and *delighting* them – exceeding their expectations. This means you’ve got to listen to what the customer really cares about. And associates must be empowered to “break the rules” of doing only what is expected. Make clear that “doing the unexpected” is what is expected.

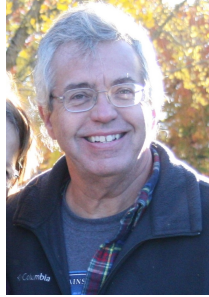
The best leadership comes from examples. Examples that are seen, and examples that are talked about.

When people do well, give them recognition. Celebrate the occasions when people give great service. Tell stories!

Recognize the value of every job.

Make certain that the organization itself always does the right thing; that it sets an example of being a responsible corporate citizen.

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