

Killing the 'termites' of BAD or ineffective service

by Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

Have a friend who bought a lovely *wood frame cabin* in a picturesque spot in BC's interior. He really enjoyed owning this place and looked forward to escaping the pressures of his hectic career to relax there. And, I was hoping to be asked to come for regular visits. ☺

This changed one year when it was discovered that he had a nest of 'termites' in one area of his foundation. Now fortunately for him, they were discovered and eradicated in time, before he would have had to replace the whole foundation.

Termites eat holes or tunnels through the wood to get where they want to go, and in the process seriously undermine the structural integrity. In time the structure collapses when the foundation can no longer support the weight of the building. And you can't see it from the outside. **It takes careful and regular inspections to insure that termites aren't eating away at your foundation or structure.**

I thought about that in relation to our careers and businesses. In many instances a once brilliant career stalls and the person is relegated to the '*also-rans*.' A business folds and people wonder why? (Well, not the dissatisfied customers!) **In many cases, the 'termites' of BAD or ineffective service have done their secret work in weakening the structure until it collapsed.**

But it doesn't have to happen. Regular check ups will make sure your '*Customer Service process*' isn't infested with '*termites*'. It is possible to ensure they don't get in, by having a solid training foundation and encouraging an ongoing value based service culture. It takes diligence, constant commitment and leadership-by-example from the owner or manager, but it can be done.

I'd suggest a little check up in these three areas might be a good place to start.

- Values
- Motives
- Attitude

Let's talk about Values.

I feel values drive our attitudes and motives and the way we behave in public. Values are an inner guidebook, if you will, that direct or influence our behavior. They are the 'unwritten rules' by which we live our lives -- and they show up in everything we do. Whether we like to admit it or not -- our behavior is very often consistent with our values.

Let me ask you another question: What are the 2-3 most important values in your life? Take a moment and seriously consider this question. *Write down your answers!*

Now, the real question: How are these *values* showing up in your career or business? And how can you better focus these values to help you provide real value-based customer service?

Motives reflect the reasons WHY I do what I do.

For example, you may work hard and diligently to be noticed or gain a competitive edge in business. You may also work hard because it's expected. Or you may work hard, because you believe in giving 100% in everything you do.

- Take a moment and ask yourself WHY you do some of the things you do on the job?
- Are there areas that might use a tune up?

Attitudes reflect the way we think.

They reflect in the way we work and show to the world what we really value.

They really show up in how we relate to people -- hint: **it can't be faked!** If your customers are a source of interruption and grief for you -- it shows! If they are a welcome addition to your day -- it shows!

- What do your actions say about your attitudes?
- Did you recognize a few attitudes that needed a spring-cleaning?
- What changes are you committed to making in your attitudes?

Doing some research will give you a good idea where you may have areas of concern or 'termites' working deep inside your business or actions of your personnel.

One way of doing that would be to conduct **'exit' interviews** (or hire someone to do them) as customers leave your place of business. I remember discussing this at an International Tourism Summit in Whitehorse, where I was invited to be the luncheon keynote speaker by the Yukon Government.

Think about the last time you shopped somewhere or were dealing with a business? Ask yourself some of these *'exit'* interview questions. Then, take a look at your business and ask the same ones or have them asked. The answers might surprise you!

1. When I entered the store, how well was I greeted and made to feel comfortable?
2. While I was in the store, how did they make me feel important?
3. During my shopping or business experience, did they effectively find out what I wanted or needed? Did they help me get what I wanted?
4. In my conversations with staff, how effectively was I listened to, and what I said?
5. As I left, what did they do that would encourage me to want to come back again?

Let me ask you a series of **pertinent questions about your career or business.**

1. After having contact with you -- how would you like people to feel?
2. What would you want them to say about you?
3. How would you want them to tell their friends about their experience with you?

Do you have a **current and relevant MISSION STATEMENT?**

- Is it something that all your staff have had input in developing and are in support and agreement with its aims?
- Is it visible for customers and staff alike to see while in the work environment? If not, WHY NOT!

Remember it needs to be a *living document*. By that I mean, it should be dusted off once in a while and revisited to ensure it is current and relates to your changing customer and your staff expectations.

EXIT STATEMENTS

Exercise: Take a moment and write your own exit statement. Visualize an impartial person stationed outside your place of business, who is primed to ask each person who leaves the following question: "**How would you describe the experience and treatment you've just had in _____?**"

If someone were to ask that question to each of your customers, what would you want their response to sound like? Take a moment and write down your best-desired response.

Now, if this is the response you'd like to hear, and you see a G A P between that and what they most likely receive now -- what needs to change?

If you really want people to say what you desire about you and your business what needs to change in these areas. This is where you build a foundation that is resistant to 'termites' and will support a successful career and business into the 21st Century.

What changes are you committed to making personally and corporately in each of these areas?

- Attitudes:
- Motives:
- Values:
- Greetings:
- Answering questions and finding solutions:
- Being a resource center:
- Staff training:
- Management training:
- Personal training:
- Policy flexibility training:
- Mission statement update:

- Technology updates and training for effective use:
- Physical layout and structure:
- Selection and placement of goods:
- Services offered:

When you build a concrete foundation under your commitment to value-added customer service based business using these key points, you begin to build a business that will thrive and grow in the 21st Century.

When will you start! What obstacles stand in your way? How will you overcome them?

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