

# CONNECTIONS

Linking People and Ideas

Number 9 February 2006

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The Quarterly Newsletter of The Dorrian Consulting Group

## **Want to Achieve Service Superiority? Then Start with the Correct Mental Focus.**

### **Paul Dorrian**

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Before starting out on the road to service superiority, it is wise to equip one's company with the proper focus for the journey that lies ahead. It is true to suggest that if a company's top management does not wholeheartedly support the effort required to create service supremacy over its opposition, then the company is unlikely to realise its true potential. This paper sends a clear message to senior managers, including CEOs, that creating service superiority has to start with the right approach from senior management if the company's employees are going to say the right things, provide the right actions and behave in the right manner towards all customers.

### **Think Superiority not Just Excellence.**

The road to service supremacy starts with the correct mental focus, and by cumulatively delighting one customer at a time.

A good example of this approach can be found in Starbucks, the world famous speciality coffee company which built itself into a major world brand with a strategy of delighting its customers one cup at a time. A company's CEO, together with his or her management team, must focus on ensuring that each experience the customer has with the company, its products and its people is superior to anything its opposition can provide. Supremacy is therefore achieved by winning the hearts and minds of each individual customer, so that the collective result is absolute loyalty, and a commitment from each customer to your company and its products and services. This needs to be reinforced with each customer experience. If members of senior management can focus their minds individually and collectively on achieving superiority, and instil that line of thinking in each and every employee, strategic thinking gets broadened and automatically becomes more potent as employee creativity is unleashed into the marketplace.

This goes far beyond simply creating excellence, because service excellence does not guarantee service superiority over one's

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opposition. Nor does it promise service or market supremacy. Excellence is a necessary but insufficient condition for these states to exist. To achieve superiority and supremacy, one's thought process has to be orientated in the right direction from the outset.

**The ultimate relationship with one's customer lies in the here and now.** Not in the promises made in the company advertising, or sales presentations, or even in previous customer successes, but rather in the present. In that very moment when your customer experiences for himself or herself your company, its products and services, and its people, irrespective of the circumstances. This means that superiority and hence supremacy has to be built one moment at a time. One experience at a time. Each experience a customer has with your company needs to be better than what your competitors can offer, now or in the future. And to achieve superiority you need to seek on going and never ending improvement to the customer experience.

Very often, companies find it difficult to live up to the service claims they make in their advertising and promotional efforts. Banks are

particular culprits. How many times have you seen advertising by a bank advocating how the customer comes first, only to experience long queues at your local branch because of staff cutbacks at the front line? What is more galling of course is when the bank announces improved profits in the face of appalling service cutbacks. Employees get blamed for not living up to the customer expectations that have been built as a result of those appealing advertisements. The fact of the matter is that management has to shoulder the responsibility for not creating the environment and the conditions to enable employees to succeed. The resultant perceptual gap that is created in the minds of many customers leads to a lowering of the company's credibility, and the danger that future advertising and promotion will be dismissed as perfunctory. One way to avoid this is to teach yourself and your staff to live in the now. Not in the future or in the past, but rather in the present. And to do so one customer at a time. One experience at a time, with the intention of making that experience the best possible one in the customer's mind.

For example, the next time a customer approaches a staff member with a query, that

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staff member needs to put aside personal issues and actively focus their entire mind on addressing the query. This behaviour needs to permeate the entire organisation. For this is where the correct mental focus commences and the road to supremacy begins.

### **Adopt a Holistic Approach.**

Many organisations treat service as a simple extension to their existing business model, and it is often delegated to a separate department with a title such as After Sales Service or Customer Service Department. Such a move often creates the perception amongst company employees that customer service is the domain of such a department,

and therefore has nothing to do with them. Nothing could be further from the truth. To achieve supremacy one has to appreciate the interconnectivity of the fundamental concept of service, and to achieve that one has to embrace holistic thinking.

**Everyone and everything in an organisation is interconnected.** Every employee, every department, every system and every action. Each with the other.

Nothing that a company does should be undertaken without thinking about the impact that a particular action has on the company's ability to provide superior service to its customers. Examples abound. Retrenchments, reassigning staff away from the front line, the opening of a new branch, the launch of a new product, the development of a new advertising strategy, the appointment of a new CEO, a strategic acquisition or a merger, are all examples from a myriad of actions with which a typical organisation involves itself. The level of service that is finally presented to the customer is the culmination of all the actions and decisions made by the company,

its management and people. These relay a signal to the customer, which says '*this is how we intend to be of service to you. This is what we stand for.*' By adopting a holistic approach to the thinking and implementation of customer service, a more powerful, synergistic effect is created which forms the basis of competitive advantage. And remember, your goal should be to create, on a continual basis, an experience for the customer that is better than anything your opposition can produce.

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## **Never Underestimate The Power of Intent.**

The ancient Chinese philosophers had a name for it. They called it *Yi*. (pronounced yee). It means intent or will. These ancient masters believed that intent, or will, helps a human being to manage the attention of his or her mind, and therefore assert control over his or her awareness. In the modern business world this simple principle can be extended to suggest that intent on the part of the CEO or senior manager, can assist the organisation to have volitional control over the company's behaviour in the marketplace, rather than allowing service to be at the whim of the people who deal with the customer. The proviso of course is that this *yi* is strongly communicated and reinforced with every single member of staff, and that each person is encouraged to assert his or her will or intent for the good of the customer. Of course, the concept of *Yi* can be applied from any managerial level in the organisation. Any manager or supervisor can encourage his or her staff to develop and employ their *Yi*. The question which must now arise is how does one develop and apply one's *Yi*?

In developing *Yi*, training can help, but that is really limited in its effect on people's behaviour. To develop a strong sense of *Yi*, there can be no substitute for meditation. Since that is a subject in its own right, it remains outside the scope of this newsletter.<sup>1</sup> The interested reader will need to seek out a teacher who can provide guidance on the practice of meditation. However, there are two important points which need to be raised at this juncture regarding meditation.

Firstly, meditation has found its way into the business world because of its ability to calm the mind of the practitioner. That in itself can lead to better decision-making, as well as less stress, tension and anxiety. It also helps to improve one's energy levels, concentration, self-discipline and memory. Perhaps the greatest benefit to an organisation as a whole is that meditation improves the practitioner's creativity, particularly in relation to problem solving.

Secondly, for the reader who may find the introduction of meditation into his or her business too radical a concept to contemplate,

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it is interesting to note that world famous business personalities such as Sir John Harvey – Jones are avid supporters of the practice of meditation. Sir John has even gone on record to explain the benefits of meditation to his business practice and ultimately his career. <sup>2</sup>

In concluding this newsletter, I am reminded of the well-known saying from the Books of The Han Dynasty, “Nothing is impossible to a willing mind” Having a willingness to beat your opposition is one thing. Having the willingness to invest the time and effort in developing the correct mental focus in the minds of yourself and all employees is another. Yet that is where the journey to defeating your competitors begins. In the minds of everyone who works in the organisation.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The interested reader may wish to consult Fontana, David. Learn to Meditate San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999
2. Prominent international business figure, Sir John Harvey – Jones, who is the former Chairman and Chief Executive of ICI, in its heyday Britain’s largest manufacturing concern, is on record as having said ‘Like many businessmen, I ignored my health, my blood pressure was high, I worked from 6 a.m. till midnight, drank too much and took no

exercise... I took up meditation when I found myself going down the Victor Meldrew route: I had a shorter fuse and things began to worry me that had not before. Meditation is very helpful: I’m more benign and it helps me get another perspective on myself. I think every businessman would benefit.’ In addition to these comments by Sir John, it is claimed that over 100 Japanese companies have introduced meditation programmes. In addition, it is also claimed that meditation has been learnt by tens of thousands of business executives all over the world. In Japan alone 10,000 business people including 2000 top executives have learned this practice. See [Businesses succeed with Transcendental Meditation.htm](#)

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