

## 'Express' Yourself

For tips on how to soar in business, take a flier on ... an airline company?



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**IN THE MIDWEST** there is an airline called, appropriately enough, Midwest Express. Though the airline's hub is in Milwaukee, customers routinely make the drive from Chicago, bypassing two closer airports to get there, all for the privilege of paying 10 to 20% more. Why? The Midwest experience. There are no middle seats, and all the seats are leather and oversized. Meals are served on china (seconds are offered) and are served with warm chocolate chip cookies on all afternoon and evening flights. Most flights are direct. And – to me, this is the best part – Midwest employees actually smile. If a problem occurs, they tell you the truth as soon as they know it, and they care enough about their customers to get them to their destinations on time, no matter what.

It's no surprise, then, why people go out of their way to fly Midwest Express. They are also tremendously loyal. Several

years ago, a major network did a program on Midwest. The network broadcast testimonials from delighted customers raving about the seats, the service, and, of course, the chocolate chip cookies. For days, Midwest Express' phones were jammed with callers from all over North America wanting to know when the airline would start flying to their city. This was startling: After all, it is the airline industry. The next person I meet who urges me to fly United or Delta or U.S. Air will be the first. But bring up Midwest Express to someone from Wisconsin and you'll get a passionate recommendation.

Think things are tough in our industry? How'd you like to be running an airline? Yet, as Midwest Express demonstrates, a company can make it in a very tough industry by delighting their customers. This is the feeling that you need to generate with your business. You want customers to be so happy with your products or services that they can't wait to tell their friends and relatives about them.

So enough with the economy already! Let's get back to work. Let's get back to the business of business. Get productive, get proactive. And in our business that means focusing on the customers. You have to find ways to delight your customers, because if they are delighted with your services they will not leave. Always keep your eye on the customer. Do you know what your customer wants? Why they use your service or product? How networked they are? Is the customer driving your company's direction? Do you get many referrals from your customers? Do you get many complaints?

Everything you do should be focused on servicing, or better yet, *astounding* your customers. It's that simple. If

this is your goal, you will succeed. How do you know what want your customers want? Ask them. Whether you build small volume, high-tech boards or mega-volume single-sided PCBs or flex and rigid-flex, it doesn't matter. Your job is to focus on knowing everything there is to know about your customers. Find out who they are, why they use your products, and what surprises and delights them about your business. We've all heard how unhappy customers will eventually pass word to enough people to fill a small country. By the same token, satisfied customers may tell only a few others, but – and this is key – those who are surprised and delighted will share their experience with as many people as they can. If the tale is truly exceptional, they will become your top sales and marketing medium. You can even solicit their endorsements for your Web site and sales literature.

To provide great products and services you have to

### Think things are tough? **HOW'D YOU LIKE TO RUN AN AIRLINE?**

know what your customers want. This is not always easy, but the best way to learn is to simply ask. Most people have very strong opinions about what they like and what they don't. Take Midwest Express, for example. Their customers don't like middle seats, so the planes don't have middle seats. That's a no-brainer. They fly direct; who likes connections? And then there's the service.

Think about what your customers like and dislike. Some of these things are obvious. They like courteous service. They love a great value. They love special treatment. They don't like to wait. They hate being overcharged. If you're not spending every minute thinking about how to delight your customers, you are not doing your job.

Get to know your customers. Ask them what they think of your business. Ask them how they feel about your product. Learn what about your business they would change, if they could. These are things you can learn through formal surveys or by just talking to them: It doesn't really matter how you do it, so long as you do it. I know of a CEO of a multibillion-dollar electronics manufacturing firm who personally calls five customers a day, everyday, to see how he is doing. If he can find the time to do this, so can we all.

Want to read a great book about delighting your customers? Try *Fish! Tales*, by Stephen Lundin, Philip Strand, John Christensen, and Harry Paul (Hyperion Press). ○

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