

4 ingredients to designing great customer experience



South African consumers are generally exposed to very low levels of service on a daily basis. No matter where you wish to spend your money – at restaurants, hotels, or shops, you are likely to experience a lack of care and indifference from the staff, who is presumably there to serve you. However, South Africans tend to respond with apathy. After a rather disappointing Sunday lunch experience at a local restaurant, it made me consider the reasons we have become seemingly complacent, and how business can improve customer experience, using 4 important ingredients in their approach.

As a typical “When Harry met Sally” type of customer with very specific sentiments towards my menu preferences, I ordered a glass of local MCC (sparkling wine). I requested that if the bottle had already been opened, I would prefer to drink something else. Nevertheless, a not-so-sparkling room temperature glass of MCC found its way to my table, decorated with a cherry! The waitron had clearly thought the cherry would be an aesthetic addition to the wine and had no knowledge of how it should be served, the manager soon explained to me. At this point most South Africans either begrudgingly drink the MCC or leave it on the table, to avoid at all cost the unpleasantness that usually follows complaints. Most of us rather “talk with our feet” and never return.

What is the reason for the apathy? How have we become so complacent? Where is the root of the problem? Why do we tend to not address inappropriate, incorrect, indifferent or unsatisfactory behaviour?

Is it the employees?

Does the problem lie at the feet of the **employees**? Employees are often disengaged and view their jobs as a means-to-an-end, and are ignorant, untrained or disempowered. Are their responses to customer-facing challenges the root of the problem? Are they avoiding accountability by thinking that the customer is not always right, that they are illogical, out of control, having a “bad day”, unreasonable and taking it out on the staff (“it’s them, not us!”)?

Is it the business owners?

Or are **business owners** to blame? Are they simply not appreciating the importance of getting the right staff to represent their brand or investing too little in training? Or are they too arrogant? Is that why they are turning a blind eye and minimise responsibility or placing blame on the customer? Do business owners really understand what their customers want from them and what problems to solve?

Is it the consumers?

Or is it perhaps the **customer** who is being difficult or unreasonable? Maybe even avoiding the unpleasant reaction when addressing the problem with staff or management, or even worse, is it the feeling the customer is left with (“I became a screaming bitch!”) when complaining, that make consumers avoid asking for what they want?

Within this triangle of players, customer experience has taken the back seat. And by not addressing this, we are not cultivating great experiences nor repeat business: both of these are essential to sustainability.

4 Vital Elements for Great Customer Experiences

1. Listen to your customers: The best source of information about the experience of customers, is the customer. – especially the unhappy customer. Customers use many ways to “tell” you how they feel and what they need. Review the content of customer feedback through the various channels – social media, emails, website, contact centers, etc. Analyse customers’ typical problems and needs (including unspoken needs) using categories such as price, product features, product defects, people issues, process issues, service delivery, service recovery etc. These will provide a framework of areas to consider in the design of the ideal customer journey.

2. Design: Design the experiences (including desired emotions) you wish your customers to have when buying your product or service.

[Customers’ experiences](#) can be designed and specific 'peaks' (great, feel-good experiences) should be built into the [customers’ journey](#). “Walking in the customers’ shoes”, i.e. immersing

yourself in your customers' journey, will provide great insight and reveal opportunities to enhance the experience.

The customer is the starting point. Plot your customers' journey, step by step, with the view of understanding

- what is important (wants, needs and expectations) for your customers at specific points in the journey.
- what you are currently delivering and how your customers experience it, as well as how internal protocols, processes, and procedures impact on the service delivery (and recovery).
- opportunities to create "feel-good" moments by building in surprise elements and making it easier for customers to do business with you. What experience and emotion do you want your customer to have? Is it being recognised? Do they feel value/safe/part of a group/special/important/appreciated? Did you create a home-away-from-home-experience?

Once an outside-in view on customers' journeys becomes the framework of thinking, all decisions and actions should be guided by how customers will experience it.

3. Training: Get employees involved to do the right thing. Enable staff to know what is expected and *why*, how to deliver it and not just what they need to do. Help employees understand your brand values and how you want them to display this in their behaviour. Share the customer journey map with employees and let them become co-designers of the ideal journey.

4. Recruitment: Find the right people to *be* (represent) your brand. Make sure you hire for attitude, not aptitude. Remember that people are not motivated by compensation only and thrive in a positive working environment. A sense of purpose (understanding the real problems you are solving for customers), belonging and empowerment goes a long way in cultivating the right approach to customers. Design the desired personality profile and recruit only with this in mind.

Be the change – start now by designing your brand's ideal customer journey and help improve South African consumers' experience of service.

The Consumer Psychology Lab is a [customer experience consultancy](#) with extensive know-how of measuring emotion. Our highly skilled psychologists interview customers about their experience and provide our clients with deep insights into consumers' experience and behaviour. We are also passionate about equipping companies with the most suitable CX tools and skills.

