Trainer Tools

Customer Care Case Study
Case Study - A Night Out

Trainer Guidelines

There are many ways in which the ‘A Night Out’ case study can be used. Perhaps it is most beneficial when used during the early stages of any generic Customer Care training programme, and is more relevant to junior staff levels. It provides a basic description of a night out taken by an average couple and reflects a fairly typical customer experience, with a mix of good and not so good elements incorporated into the scenario.

As a trainer it is helpful to use this study to get participants thinking about the ‘service journey’ concept - the psychological process surrounding any customer interaction:

- Expectations
- Experience
- Evaluation

Prior to introducing the Case Study to participants, it is important for you as trainer to deliver a short input session explaining to participants that as people who are responsible for looking after guest needs, they need to understand the process that customers go through every time they experience service of some kind. In other words you should put the programme participants ‘in the customer’s shoes’ so to speak. This can be achieved in a number of ways such as;

Get participants to imagine if they had just booked their summer holiday - they would build up ‘expectations’ as the holiday drew nearer. Then off they would go and ‘experience’ the holiday. Then on their way home, they would give some thought as to whether they had enjoyed the holiday, or in other words they would ‘evaluate’ it. In reality they would just be going through the above process.

You should then explain that as customers we all go through this ‘journey’ every time we experience service. Sometimes it is in a big way like going on holidays and sometimes in a small way like buying food in our local shop. From that, you should explain that their guests go through this ‘journey’ every time they experience their service; it is up to them to make their experience as enjoyable and memorable as possible by ensuring that the service they offer not only meets but surpasses expectations.

Using the Case Study

Once you have drawn out the ‘service journey’ concept, you can then have participants work on the case study. They should;

- First, read the Case Study individually - allow 10 minutes approx
- Then, divide the participants into groups and get them to:
  - Identify Guest Expectations for this particular night out
  - Highlight the Good/Bad elements of the Experience in chronological order
  - Consider what they think the guests’ Evaluation was likely to have been?

The full exercise should take about 30 minutes, including feedback.
Handling Feedback

The issues in the Case Study are fairly self-evident and the groups should have no difficulty in drawing them out. As a tutor, you should ensure that you flag the following points during the feedback:

**Inconsistent** - the experience was obviously inconsistent and this is a major problem in any service business, particularly in a competitive environment. Inconsistent service confuses the customer and leads to a breakdown in trust.

**Risk factor** - building on this point regarding inconsistency, you should also draw out that whilst individual customers may continue to go to a place where service is inconsistent, they will only do so when it represents low risk to them. For example, we all go to local restaurants or pubs which may not be great, but they are convenient and at the end of the day, if it’s not a great experience, only we ourselves suffer. However, we don’t use such places for the more high risk events in our lives: weddings, important meetings or conferences, special family occasions etc. because the danger of things not being right is too high (as per the wedding example in the case study). But for a hospitality business the real money is in the high risk events.

**Teamwork** - the final key point to draw out is that there is no point in one person, or an individual department, delivering excellent service if all employees in all departments don’t do the same. The customer judges the whole experience and as such good teamwork is critical in hospitality.

**Alternative Uses for the Case Study**

This case Study could also be used with a more senior supervisory or management group, but rather than focus on what is detailed above, you could get the participants to read the study and identify what might be the underlying causes of the poor performance;

- Poor training
- Low Motivation levels
- Lack of standards
- Inadequate supervision etc.

Using the study in this context is useful as an opener to getting management groups to consider what broader issues may have to be addressed in their operation in terms of enhancing service quality.
Case Study 1 - A Night Out

This particular week had been a nightmare for Mary. The kids had come down with the flu and had been home from school since Tuesday. So, rather than having her usual few quiet hours each day, she found herself stuck at home all week. By Thursday night she was well and truly at her wits-end and needed a night out. She chatted to her husband John about how she felt, so they decided they would go out on Friday night.

On Friday morning Mary telephoned a local hotel. The receptionist who answered was very friendly. She wasn’t sure of the opening times of the restaurant, as she was only new, but she offered to connect Mary to her colleague in The Sunflower Restaurant, so she could make a booking with her. Following the call transfer, a young lady answered the phone:

“Is this the Sunflower?” asked Mary.
“Yes, it is, what can I do for you?” answered the girl.

“Ehm, I’d like to make a booking for two people for tonight, if possible?”

“That’s fine, hang on and I’ll check for you,” came the reply and the girl went off to find out.

As she did so, in the background, Mary could hear her calling out to someone to help her find the diary. Mary waited and eventually the girl came back:

“Now, how many people was that for?” the girl asked.
“It’s for two, at 9.00pm,” said Mary.

“And your name is?”

“You can book it in the name of John Roche.”

“Ok, that’s great so, see you tonight then. Thanks, bye.”

“Ehm, could we have a quiet table by the...”

Mary was just asking this question when the phone went dead. Oh, she said to herself, she’s in a bit of a hurry, but, sure, we can sort it out tonight.

For the rest of the day, Mary was looking forward to her night out. She even thought of buying herself a new outfit as a treat, but she knew John would hit the roof, so she just picked out one of the outfits she liked. John arrived home about six and started to get ready. Mary could tell he’d had a bad day as he was miles away. As soon as the baby-sitter arrived they left. As they drove up towards the hotel, John started to relax a little and they chatted away; Mary mentioned the news about her sister getting married. John made some smart comment about love being blind which made them both laugh. As they drove into the car park they could tell it was quite busy. A security guard was on duty directing traffic. John couldn’t find a space for ages and eventually squeezed into a space at the end of a row of cars. They were just getting out of the car when the guard came over:

“Hey, you can’t park there.”

“But, this is the only place I could find,” replied John.

“Look, you’ll have to move it anyway,”

Normally John would have argued the point, but he could tell by looking at Mary that it was the last thing she needed.

“You go on ahead, Mary, and I’ll find a space and follow you in shortly.”

As Mary walked into the hotel, she noticed how clean the front looked. They obviously keep it nice she felt. As she waited in the lobby, she noticed that they held weddings at the hotel. I must tell sis about this place - it would be nice for her wedding, she thought. She also noticed they had a brochure stand and made a mental note to collect one on the way out. When John arrived into the lobby, she could tell he was on a short fuse. “We’re a bit early, let’s go for a drink first,” said Mary calming him down and they headed towards the bar. Once inside, they were glad to see that there were some tables free. None of them were clean, but at least they had somewhere to sit.
They waited for a while for lounge service but finally John went to the bar. On his way back with the drinks, he asked one of the floor staff if they would come over and wipe the table. “As soon as I get this order,” was the reply. The lounge boy did come over shortly thereafter. Mary smiled to herself as she saw him coming because he had his shirt sticking out at the back.

“Good evening,” said the lounge boy, and he nodded towards their drinks. John lifted both drinks and he wiped the table.

“You’re busy tonight,” said Mary.

“No, not really, it’s just that there’s never enough staff on here, so we’re run off our feet as usual. Can I get you anything else while I’m here?”

“No thanks,” they both replied and off he went.

When they had finished their drinks, they moved towards the restaurant. As they entered, a girl at a little desk inside the door looked up briefly and asked them if they had a reservation. Mary said they had; in the name of Roche for two at nine o clock. The girl looked through the diary but didn’t seem to be able to find the booking:

“I telephoned today and made the booking with one of the staff,” said Mary.

“Did you get her name?” asked the receptionist.

“No, I didn’t actually,” replied Mary.

“Well, there’s no booking here, so you’ll have to take a seat; we are very busy at the moment. Mary was more than a little annoyed, but she tried to remain calm as she knew it wouldn’t take much to set John off. “Oh well, these things happen,” she said as they sat down.

After a few minutes, a gentleman approached them. He introduced himself as the Head Waiter and apologised for the mix up. He explained that they were preparing a table and that they could look through the menus while they were waiting. Mary asked if they could have a quiet table and he said it would be fine as the one being prepared was next to the window. He handed them the menus and left, returning a short time later to escort them to their table. After they were seated, he took the order and headed to the kitchen. A young girl brought them some bread and iced water. “Good evening,” she said, “my name is Sarah and I’ll be looking after you tonight.”

John and Mary now started to relax and as the evening progressed the food was excellent. Sarah was very good too and looked after them extremely well. When the meal was over, they went back to the bar for a quick drink before they headed for home. John saw the barman checking his watch as they came in. “Yes?” he asked them as they reached the bar. They ordered their drinks and sat down. “That was a lovely meal,” said Mary. John quickly agreed. They chatted away for a while, but got the impression that the staff were looking to finish up:

“They’ve only just served last orders,” said John.

“I know,” said Mary “but let’s go anyway, I’m tired.”

On the way home in the car, Mary remembered that she had forgotten to take one of the wedding brochures. Then she thought about it for a while and decided that maybe that wasn’t such as bad thing as her sister might be better off trying somewhere else . . .