

For Loyalty, Trust, and Engagement, Manage Experiences

Employee beliefs, behaviors, loyalty, trust, engagement, and the safety culture of your organization are all byproducts of the experiences they have with the safety improvement efforts and the behavior of leadership. If you want to change these byproducts, you have to change the influences upon them. You have to change the experience.

With keynote speaking, workshops, and consulting engagements, I travel more than the average person. From airlines to car rentals and hotels, I have preferred vendors. As any frequent business traveler can tell you, consistency is much appreciated. In fact, you come to expect it. When the expectations are exceeded, loyalty strengthens, and it furthers the potential of becoming a self-identified brand ambassador. When the expectations aren't met, trust is diminished and you begin to look at alternate options for spending your resources.

The car rental company Hertz has a level of service above what can be reached through frequency of use. With the constant flying I do, it made sense to pay the annual fee to be provided what Hertz describes as "the utmost in personal attention with benefits that include having your rental vehicle personally delivered to you at the airport terminal or waiting for you at most U.S. private jet terminals or rental locations." Also included are private car service back to the airport or nearby hotel. While there are additional bonuses, including financial benefits, the pick-up and drop-off service alone makes it worth the fee, especially when you are running late or flights are delayed.

Recently, I moved up my flight time from Houston to Seattle due to time constraints. Because I was landing two hours early, I called Hertz to request an earlier pick-up time. After a few rings and only two prompts, I was connected to a representative. I was first asked what my level was and was told I need to be transferred to a special line for platinum members. I was placed on hold for three minutes, then the line disconnected. After verifying it wasn't an issue on my end, I called back. I quickly told the rep that I would like her help with this simple issue without being transferred. After providing my confirmation number, she was very helpful. At the end of making this change, I was told that I still needed to speak with someone in platinum services. Confused, I was connected, and thankfully the hold time was only about two minutes.

When connected, I was asked again for my name, confirmation number, and what the issue was. Clearly, there was no information transferred with my call. After complying, my request was taken care of, again. So I thought. As I left security and discovered the Hertz driver was nowhere to be found, I placed a call to the location. Surprised, they said they would send the car as they still showed me as scheduled to arrive several hours later. Clearly, the calls placed four hours earlier had not been effective. As a loyal customer, I was left with another unfortunate experience.

Like car rentals, frequent business travel necessitates the use of dry-cleaning services. I have historically used two different service providers: a discount dry-cleaning location and Men's Warehouse. The latter are a bit more expensive due to the valet service in my

area that picks up and drops off clothing directly to my home. In one day, with two drastically different experiences, I gave Men's Warehouse all of my future business.

With a discount dry-cleaning service, I set my expectations low but expect at least a minimal level of service. As I arrived to pick up a few brand-new shirts I had dropped off, a white one was provided with a yellow stain on the back right shoulder. Knowing the condition they were in when dropped off, I inquired about this and what can be done. I received a shrug from the owner and was told there is nothing they can do, sometimes this happens with the group to which they outsource cleaning.

When I arrived home, more clothes were hanging on my front door, courtesy of Men's Warehouse. As I put them away, there was a tag on the front of one of my shirts that read, "We've replaced a button for you. It's part of our guarantee." What guarantee? I didn't even know I was missing a button. How wonderful!

I'm willing to pay more for service that delights me and continues to exceed my expectations. A simple search in your favorite browser will show a plethora of research that demonstrates I'm not alone in that regard. I'm sure I'm also not alone in similar experiences with a pleasant surprise or unexpected disappointment. These experiences affect brand loyalty and the stories told about the organization.

Just as companies have external customers, they also have internal ones. People affected by the business improvement efforts and those whose discretionary effort is sought are the internal customers. What is the loyalty to the safety program and improvement efforts? What are the experiences that are shaping the story-telling within your organization? What experiences would prompt employees to pay more with the currency of their discretionary effort? Work to identify the alignment or misalignment between the desired, consistent internal customer experience and the reality. An organization either manages the experiences and stories or will be managed by them. **OHS**

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