

Buyer-Seller Relationship-An Analysis of Customer Service Experience with Barber Shop

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ABSTRACT

It's widely accepted that to understand customer is an enigma. Hence every service providers attract different customer groups. This customer group's level of satisfaction will also differ. It's normally observed that satisfied customer use to avail the repetitive services from the same seller or service provider. But the other way around, there are also some customers, despite satisfaction from the existing service providers, they defect. It's fact that 100 % customer retention is not possible practically though seller try to retain the customers. This has an implication on the service provider's income, profitability and growth. The paper highlights the issues and strategies which construct or destruct the buyer-seller relationship with especially reference to the Barber's services. On the basis of various situations which barber come across a customer, that has been explained with reference to the different situations to which barber get exposed to.

Key words: Buyer-Seller Relationship, Service Quality, Trust, Customer Defection, Relationship Strategies.

Introduction

Background: Everybody wish to look good, feel good. Since long, human beings have used to adopt different techniques to groom one's personality. The underlying logic is that people like pleasing personality. Such people get acceptance, appreciation and respect from society. The need to groom oneself may be internally or externally motivated. Social conventions, traditions, values guide human beings to take certain steps. Sometimes, the person's individual belief and values stimulates oneself to reflect behavior in different social contexts. From aesthetic, psychological and health point of view, since time immemorial, the human beings use to avail the various services to improve quality of life. Barber services is one among them. Hair cut, shaving, massage, face lifting etc are some of the beauty and health care services commonly provided through Barber shop

Customer Retention vs Defection: It's really interesting to know why some people flock to some of the barber shops and why some barber shops experience less customer traffic. The reasons behind this may be many. It spans from service quality to interpersonal relationship. Multiple customers think differently in different situations in different contexts. That is the reason that some of the customer stay loyal to the barber and some get defected. Every barber shop wish to retain the customers by offering them the service quality. This service quality specifically depends upon the barber's expertise, skills, knowledge and empathy. It's widely accepted that to understand customer is an enigma. Hence every service providers attract different customer groups. This customer group's level of satisfaction will also differ. It's normally observed that satisfied customer use to avail the repetitive services from the same seller or service provider. But the other way around, there are also some customers, despite satisfaction from the existing service providers, they defect. It's fact that 100 % customer retention is not possible practically though seller try to retain the customers. This has an implication on the service provider's income, profitability and growth. This compels the barber to improvise the service quality as per the changing expectations of the customers. Service failure on behalf of barber results in customer dissatisfaction. Sometimes this dissatisfaction is voiced through complaints or sometimes customer defects without registering any complaints. Those customers who defected silently, the reasons of their dissatisfaction go unrecorded. To regain such types of lost customers is difficult as they exit without raising their voice. Those customers who express their dissatisfaction, they should be taken seriously by the barber. This will help the barber to improvise on the various quality dimensions of the customer service. Such types of customers can be reassured of the service quality by practically bring the changes in processes, people or shop environment. These customers, which are prone to defect, they can be prevented by building the confidence in the relationship.

Confidence and Trust-A tool to develop relationship: Confidence and trust plays vital role in building and strengthening the relationship between the service provider and the customers. Confidence is effect of past experiences. Experience may be either positive or negative. Positive experiences help in constructing relationship and negative experiences helps in deteriorating the relationship. Hence, confidence in relation between service provider and the customer only comes through effective service delivery as per the customer expectation. It's more visible and easy to understand as the situations and its effect can be evaluated instantly. Hence, building confidence is first steps in developing the relationship.

Trust's literal meaning is commonality or similarity of values and beliefs in between the service provider and customer. Now the values are the deep rooted beliefs which are the outcomes of one's experiences in past these rooted beliefs has influence on the perception. Perception is simply how customer or service provider analyze, receives and evaluate the situations .As mentioned, belief is deep rooted and it's difficult to change. Trust between the buyer & seller is largely based in their similar thinking, attitude, values and beliefs. Most of the times, trust is based on ignorance or unfamiliarity of situations. As ignorance starts diminishing with the passage of time, knowledge pervades. These processes gradually weaken or strengthen the relationship based on the trust. In various contexts and in various situations, the simultaneous occurrence of trust or distrust may be there. It's ambivalent and hence difficult to say that trust and distrust are opposite to each other. Hence confidence and trust which contributes exchanges as per the expectations of service providers and customers creates substantial base for strengthening relationship. Still, it's difficult to understand the various complex dimensions of strengthened and broken relationship. Managing the confidence, trust and distrust in right direction needs understanding those influential factors which affect the quality of relationship. The location of barber shop, skills of barber, no of barber, interpersonal skills of barber, shop ambience, type of services, culture, service charges ,service quality etc are some of the major influential factors which affects the relationship.

Customer Experience and Relationship Strategies

The situations illustrated below highlights what actually helps in building and breaking the relationship and the strategy that should be adopted by the barber.

Situation 1: Customer waiting time and service rate

Barber shop is occupied with Barbers, Chairs, requisite infrastructure and material required to execute the services. Number of chairs in a barber shop decides the service rate. If the number of customers waiting in the queue is more than the chairs occupied, the customers normally won't wait to avail services. In such instance, either customer will postpone availing services or wait in queue to avail services. The constraints on the customer side, here is time, urgency, alternative options available, distance between the service provider and the locational base of the customer. If most of the time, if customer experience the situation that the no of customers waiting are more than the no of chairs, the customer will find out alternative options. It means the customer will defect owing to time constraints.

Strategy to build relationship:

- a) Provide convenient seating arrangement

- b) Entertain customer by providing audio, audio visuals, newspapers, magazines etc.
- c) Creates adequate shop environment through interior design, proper ventilation, drinking water facilities, cleanliness etc.
- d) Prioritize customer's service level by maintaining customer database
- e) Offer preferential treatments to loyal customers
- f) Customer's waiting time can be reduced by offering them the sms/call services

Situation 2: Chair is unoccupied, the barber is not present or doing his own work

Sometimes customers visit a shop with an intention that the services will be offered, but barber shows disinterest in providing service. Reasons may be a barber's own attitude, sincerity, concerned for customer service and long term prospects for business growth. The level of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction highly depends upon how the customer is received, treated and respected in the barber shop by barbers. The soft skill aspects like empathy, respect, sincerity, honesty; integrity highly matters and deeply influences the depth and breadth of relationship at a formal and informal level.

Strategy to build relationship:

- a) While recruiting barber, hire him for attitude and deep concern for customer service
- b) Offer them training and when adequate skill level is attained ,they should be gradually utilized for offering services
- c) Timely availability of barber is important. Hence the qualities like work discipline, sincerity, tactfulness and friendliness should be inculcated

Situation 3: Personal relationship of barber with Customer

Customers and barber's relationship depends upon similarity of thinking, region, beliefs, values and level of friendliness. If personal relationship is strong, then chances are there that customer will stay loyal to the barber. In case of chair occupancy, customer will either wait or either avail the services at the different time in a day or some other day without defection.

Strategy to build relationship:

- a) Barber shop owner should take adequate care while hiring barbers in their shop for service delivery. The healthy culture of professionalism, informality and motivation to be maintained.
- b) Occasion specific gifts, rewards, calls, sms system to be developed
- c) Barber shop owner should develop a personal relationship with all the customers who avail the services from their shop

Situation 4: Service failure on behalf of barber

In an attempt to generate maximum business, if service quality is neglected, then the customer is unhappy. When two customers are discriminated for offering the same service, then their ego gets hurt. Sometimes this is the reason that the regular customer gets defected as the service quality and the preferred treatment which they expect, they wouldn't receive.

Strategy to build relationship:

- a) Service quality delivery is an outcome of barber's skills and knowledge. The quality delivered by the barber is an outcome of training and development in soft and hard skills.

Situation 5: Shifted location base of either customer or barber

The customer is satisfied with the services of barbers, but in case if customer shifts location or if barber change location base which is inconvenient to avail services then the frequency of exchanges gradually get reduced. After some times this regular exchange gets converted into an occasional exchange of services and later on relationship broke automatically.

Situation 6: Replaced barber/Exit of existing barber

In barber shop, it is observed that there are customers who are loyal to barber owing to their skills, personal relationship. If such barber exit /separate from the barber shop owing to certain reasons, then customer defection took place. The customer either shifts along with the barber or search for the new service provider.

Strategy to build relationship:

- a) Initial habit among the barber to be developed to rotate the customers unless and until specifically demanded by the customer

Conclusions

Buyer and seller understand the significance of service quality and effective service delivery in customer satisfaction. It's fact that the service delivered by a majority of the sellers lacks in quality. It becomes a hurdle in developing trust, confidence in the buyer seller relationship. Hence, listening and understanding the customers well and then refining and designing the key processes which has a substantial impact on the customer satisfaction. Accordingly, customized services can be offered by developing, building and nourishing the relationship between buyer and seller.

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