

# Empowering TIMES



October 2011

## Editor's DESK

Dear Reader,

Recently I was reading about the government mulling the opening up of foreign direct investment in the retail industry. I agree that this will have an impact on the sales of the now ubiquitous ' general & provision stores' , but I am convinced that it will not be the end of the road for the stores. My belief arises from the fact that these stores practice the basics of customer service management right, day in and day out from 7 AM in the morning to 11 PM in the night. Personalized, dedicated service is what marks the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful organisation. In this month' s issue, we take a deep-dive in the concept of Customer Service Management and I can say one thing definitely, businesses will be better-off if they realize early that the ' Customer is the King' !

In this month' s **Thinking Aloud**, Meeta talks to us about the importance of Customer Service Management. In today' s world for any business to survive, keeping the customer happy is of utmost importance. Meeta shares with us some instances of how industries have evolved and benefited from better customer service. According to her, it is not only important to have a right mix of service for your business, but applying it consistently is the key.

On the **Podium** this month, **Aditya Malla, Director – Sales & Marketing, the Westin Hotel (Hyderabad)**, shares with us his experience of managing customer service in an industry which is highly customer centric, i.e., hospitality.

He tells us that with the new-age customers being far-travelled and well-read, expectations of higher standards of service has become a norm. According to him, relations with customers are of key importance

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**Thinking Aloud:** It' s Simple!! Just make your Customers happy - **Meeta Lee**

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**Figures of Speech**

By Vikram Nandwani



and he emphasizes the need of proper & on-going training to ensure standard service to all customers at all times.

In ***Between the Lines*** this month, we review the ' 2010 Culture Book' of Zappos.com. The book is authored by more than 800 employees and several business partners of Zappos.com. Vijayan tells us that the book is one of the best reads on Organisation Culture and is a strong recommendation for anyone who wants to add ' quality to character' .

In ***Standing Ovation*** this month, we present Vathsalya Charitable Trust, a NGO with the mission of finding families for homeless children within the country and abroad. The 23 years old NGO has a child care center and is well supported by its team of child care staff, doctors, nurses, health care workers, child development workers and foster parents.

In ***Figures of Speech***, Vikram presents Customer Service Management in a lighter vein!

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To visit our previous issues you can visit the Resources section on the website or simply [Click Here](#). You can also follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

And, finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Very Happy Diwali and a Prosperous New Year!



## It' s Simple!! Just make your Customers happy - Meeta Lee

There was a time when there was a sharp divide in terms of Customer Service Management between manufacturing units and service providers. This has now changed and in today' s world Service is the key! So, everyone believes that Customer Service should be excellent, WOW, super-duper, but are most organisations willing to invest in Customer Service Management?

Many organisations believe that they are providing superior service to their customers. This is their perception and we all know that there is a huge gap between what is perceived and what the facts are. It is difficult to manage if you don' t measure, so one of the steps is to put a measure in place to understand where you are.

Did you know?

A 5% increase in retention increases profits by 25 - 125%

Acquiring new customers can cost five times more than satisfying and retaining current customers

Research shows that 80% of people who do not receive good customer service do not complain, they just shift!

Every organisation must have its own customer service management recipe. The ingredients in this recipe would be the same but the quantities of the ingredients would vary from organisation to organisation. The recipe should be tried and tested and tweaked to

suit the customers. Then of course, it is important to use the recipe and not let it lie around and collect dust and then wonder what went wrong!

The other important thing is to remember the adage “ Different strokes for different folks.” Today, in the world of globalisation, the customer base has expanded and the world has become smaller. To reach out to different customers, cultural sensitivity plays a very important part in the role of Customer Service Management – not only with the external customers, but the most important customer – our internal customers. Understanding and practising cultural sensitivity not only creates a fair and respectful workplace, it also helps to get the best out of a diverse workforce.

“ Walk the Talk.” This reminds me of an incident when I walked into a store where all the executives had a badge on which said “ Happy to Help” but what they demonstrated was quite the contrary. They kept people waiting, they did not smile and they did not have the answers for so many queries and kept using “ policy” as their standard answer. Well, need I say more on “ Walk the Talk?” And me being the nasty me told them to throw those badges in the bin.

I am sure that all of you have a “ Relationship Manager” from your bank. There was a time when one had to go to the bank, wait in long queues and then face a “ robot” at the counter, a “ robot” that needed oiling and repairing. It was a helpless situation due to limitations of choice. Thanks to change – the choice increased. The “ robots” turned into “ Relationship Managers.” This point just stresses on the fact that relationships are very important in managing your customers. The banks could have continued with “ robots” and if they did, they most certainly would be out of business by now!

Many other instances come to my mind, but the message is loud and clear – If we don’ t take care of our customers, somebody else definitely will!!!

Happy reading!!

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## Aditya Malla, Director – Sales & Marketing, the Westin Hotel (Hyderabad)



**Aditya Malla, the Director of Sales and Marketing of The Westin, Hyderabad brings over seventeen years of experience in the hospitality domain. He has held senior positions as President at Skai International and was Director of sales at the Taj, prior to joining Westin. He has had the opportunity of working in several other world class hotels including the Hyatt, Holiday Inn and Oberoi in various parts of the country. In his current role, he is working on the Hotel Manager Track (High Potential Programme) of Starwood Hotels. Aditya is also a Certified Divisional Trainer for senior sales leaders of Starwood Hotels. He is a member of various associations viz NBTA, ACTE, Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of Indian Industry and Skai International. Aditya’ s expertise include sales strategizing under fierce competition, conventions sales and management, new hotel opening and critical path,**

**repositioning, F&B/ restaurant marketing, revenue and yield management and Training & Development. A graduate of**

**Economics Honours from Delhi University, Aditya is also a keen adventure sports enthusiast and enjoys camping, trekking, golf and squash.**

**ET: In your multiple years of experience, please tell us how the Customer Service Management landscape has changed in the hospitality industry. Have the changes occurred gradually or have there been periods of sudden/slow changes?**

**ASM:** Customer Service is a lot more personal now. The clear change is that today' s customer is well travelled, is aware of international service standards. He/she is clear about expectations and wants them to be met. Competition has given him that choice. Above all, the world is very well connected. Today' s customers research the product well and access to social media helps in generating opinion. Online platforms offer advice and reviews. So customer service is about transparency and customised offers now. Moving from customer satisfaction to customer delight is the other step the industry has taken in order to address competition and customer expectations.

**ET: In other industries, we often have a concept called the ' after sales service' ; does the hospitality industry have a similar concept, how does it work?**

**ASM:** In the hospitality industry the sales/relationship process lasts as long as the product is being consumed. Relationships replace the typical ' after sales service' . Relationships ensure that the buying process continues. Like most products today, travel is extremely personal and hence relationships are the focus. Therefore Loyalty Programs are becoming increasingly popular.

**ET: In the era of increased consumerism and discerning consumers, what are the key challenges faced by a customer-centric service provider?**

**ASM:** Rising expectations, highly personalised approach, online media and competition are the key challenges. Innovation differentiates a good product/service from a great one!

**ET: How do Indian companies compare with their global counterparts when it comes to Customer Service?**

**ASM:** We are far better than global companies in our approach to customer service. However, we lack the application of processes for the customer service experience, thereby bringing in an element of inconsistency. The story breaks along the way...! The quality of service you receive is greatly dependent on the person, hence bringing in the need for extensive training and processes orientation.

**ASMET: According to you, how important are training and coaching of employees to enhance Customer Service Management? Please share some specific instances if possible.**

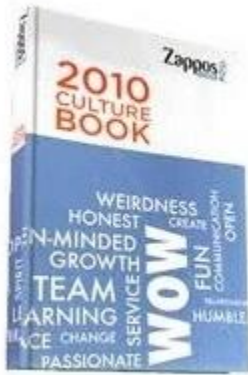
**ASM:** Speaking of training, you have hit the nail on the head! I just mentioned that Indian companies greatly lack consistency and process orientation in their CSM experience. A high quality of training and process orientation can address this gap. For instance, the check-in experience...while most of us have had great and not so great check-in experiences, few hotels focus on ensuring a consistent level of recognition and personalisation. Imagine the difference it would make if your check-in experience was equally personal and attentive each and every time...irrespective of the employee taking the check-in?

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## ‘ 2010 Culture Book’ of Zappos.com



Zappos is a VERY different company. When I sent an email to Tony Hsieh, CEO (I had been moved by his presentation at the SHRM Global conference in Las Vegas) I got a prompt reply from not one person, but from ‘ Tony and his Elves’ !

I had written to the company for a copy of their Culture book and within a few weeks - with numerous update emails to check if I had received - it was on my desk.

I am amazed at this ‘ rare gem of an entrepreneur’ and the awesome culture of the 11 years old company, Zappos.com- about a billion dollars in revenue. Being on Fortune’ s List of Best Companies to Work for is no surprise.

Many books on Organisation Culture have been written, but no other book can beat this one. There is no ‘ outside author (ghost/otherwise)’ or a ‘ calibrated inside view’ to describe the vibrant hues. The ‘ authors’ comprise over 800 plus employees (from 9 group companies) and business partners. These people have articulated their interpretation of the Culture@Zappos, based on their experiences. A few quotes, verbatim are shared below:

Jennifer W (employee since 2007)-“ When I leave work, I go to my apartment where I live:When it’ s time to come back to work--I come home to Zappos)”

John B (employee since 2010) – “ Although I have only been here since January 2010, I can sum up my thoughts about Zappos with these three simple words..I would be ‘ lost without you’ , Zappos.”

Jason W (business partner)-‘ What does the Zappos Culture mean to me?Knowing that from order to delivery and every step in between, Goal 1 for everyone at Zappos is the dedication to exceeding customers’ expectations.This is followed by Goal 2 - having the most possible fun in the process! This is what makes Zappos so special.’

Tony sent an email to ALL employees seeking content for this publication. A copy of his email, for this edition, is captured on page 9. Some of the sentences are quoted verbatim as under:

‘ Please email me a few sentences about what the Zappos culture means to you. While writing about your response, please do not refer to any previous culture books, any training/orientation material, the company handbook, or any other company-published material. We want to hear YOUR thoughts about the company culture and finally, if you contributed to last year’ s Culture book please do not look until after you have written and submitted this year’ s entry.”

Responses are edited only for spelling and typographical errors. The book has over 280 pages, numerous photographs and is printed on recycled paper, using Soy ink. The 10 core Values as presented in the book are:

1. Deliver WOW Through Service
2. Embrace and Drive Change
3. Create Fun and a Little Weirdness

4. Be Adventurous, Creative and Open-Minded
5. Pursue Growth and Learning
6. Build Open and Honest Relationships with Communication
7. Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit
8. Do More With Less
9. Be Passionate and Determined
10. Be Humble

The book is a must read book for HR professionals, Organisation Leaders, Institutional leaders and anyone who wants to add a standout quality to their character.

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STANDING  
OVATION

Vathsalya Charitable Trust

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Vathsalya Charitable Trust is a NGO started in 1988, under the Indian Trusts' Act, with the mission of finding families for homeless children within the country and abroad. The trust was founded by Mr. H Shiri and a group of like-minded people and Mrs. Mary Paul was appointed as the Director to begin the work in Bangalore. For the past 23 years, its mission has been to place abandoned and relinquished children in loving homes. Vathsalya's team not only includes the child care staff at the center, but also includes doctors, nurses, health care workers, child development workers and foster parents. Its facilities include an ICU and an informal school.

Vathsalya' s primary objectives are:

- To receive abandoned and relinquished children and place them with families in adoption.
- To establish and provide a variety of child care service such as:
  - Emergency Care Program - to support children in crisis situation until they can be permanently returned to their biological families.
  - Child Care Centers - to take care of abandoned and homeless children until permanent families can be found for them.
  - Educational Support Programs - to provide learning opportunities for the children who would otherwise be forced to work to support their families.
  - Programs for children with Special needs - to give loving long term care in cottage homes, which are designed and equipped for severely handicapped children.
- To arrange foster homes for children so that they can experience love and care on an individual basis until a permanent family is found
- To make every effort to return the child to the care of responsible biological parents if any.

..and its secondary objectives are:

- To actively develop foster care families.
- To train all foster parents in child care, nutrition and first aid so that they are equipped to meet a child' s social, physical

and emotional needs.

- To promote community based rehabilitation programs without distinction of caste, creed or community.
- To provide counseling services both for birth parents as well as adoptive parents.
- To provide opportunities for students of social work, health services and related fields to gain practical experiences through field placement in the various activities of the Trust.
- To hold and conduct classes, lectures, conferences, seminars in the field of family welfare, health, nutrition, hygiene and other subjects as and when thought fit.

For the outstanding social cause that Vathsalya stands for, it deserves a **Standing Ovation!**

If you want to get more information and support Vathsalya, you can visit its website [www.vctblr.org](http://www.vctblr.org) or call on +91-80-25457360/+91-80-25459366 or drop in a mail at [vathsalya88@rediffmail.com](mailto:vathsalya88@rediffmail.com).

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