

SUPERIOR QUALITY SERVICE AS AN OPERATIONAL STRATEGY WITH IMMEDIATE PAYOFFS

by Meg Durlach, Vice President Strategic Health Care Solutions, LLC

A Superior service strategy is based on the principle that when customers feel truly appreciated, valued and well cared for, not only are they more satisfied, but they also bring more business to the company - more often. This strategy is not new; it has been proven many times. However, this is a strategy that is highly applicable in the care of seniors, but one that is easier to talk about than to accomplish. However, it is well worth the investment.

The goal here is plain and simple. It is to have the attitudes of all employees, as well as management (and this is important because the behaviors of management and the leadership exhibited by management in exhibiting the behaviors are crucial) say through actual behaviors "I am here to serve and glad to be of service to you, the customer, whoever that customer may be". The behaviors are, if credible, delivered with attention to the details of body language. The reality of the communication is tested by the presence or absence of a smile and the physical and real willingness of the speaker to be of service. Or, in other words, does the body say the same thing as the mouth. Are the messages congruent, do they fit. This assessment is made by all of us in 30 seconds or less. So the payoff is real and tangible, or not, depending on the investment in the reality. Thus there is a need to train and to sensitize all players to the opportunities that accrue from the development of a Superior Service culture.

The organization can benefit in substantially measurable results from the investment in customer service training for all members of the organization. The benefits are: more sales, more customers, more business with each customer (repeat business or referrals for other families i.e. word of mouth advertising), from more customers you see your market share grow and you become perceived as a "winner" in the marketplace, more attractive place to work, reduced employee turnover, reduced numbers of complaints by eliminating reasons for complaints, improved morale among employees and building team spirit and pride in working for such a "Great" operation and more. The payoffs are immediate in the reduction of friction and the improvement in communication between staff and customers. Customers are much more than just Residents, for the customers are also our Families, our Physicians, and are our own wonderful, caring Employees.

The payoff often is quite immediate in morale and the feeling of team spirit and pride in work. In setting the expectation for each and every employee from the top all the way to the bottom of the organization to deliver superior service to each customer, each time, every time and following through on the expectation sends a clear message to all. And the fact that we are "Customers" of each other means we have to care for, and be careful about how we treat each other as well. The attitude is catching and rewarding for all. Managers will hear and see the results of the attitudes that show "I care about you" and appreciate that you "Care" about me your teammate and will help me because you see me as that and I will do the same to and for you. This leads to the realization of the importance of basic service skills and the importance, and fun of the smile, the prompt service, the importance of listening and creative problem solving.

Superior customer service is a lynchpin to the success of all facilities and business operations, and a key to lasting financial success of a business. A culture of Superior service also values employee participation, recognizes their success and encourages their growth. All of these elements are central to truly Superior service. Superior service becomes the best marketing an operation could develop, and, leverages all marketing efforts as it creates a strong point of differentiation for the operation in its marketing efforts for both customers, as well as recruitment and retention of employees. Superior customer service is Superior in its payoff for all involved as it increases your operation's marketing success and creates the word-of-mouth strong reputation of an outstanding c facility/community/business that delivers Superior service. It also grows your operations' reputation as a great place to work. A place where employees are really part of a team that cares about its members as it cares for its residents/customers. From this, the operation is positioned to become dominant in the marketplace from a financial standpoint as well as an operational vantage point.

(Meg Durlach is Vice President of Strategic Health Care Solutions, LLC and a 25 plus year marketing veteran with a Connecticut Nursing Home Administrators License. If you would like more information about Customer Service Training or would like to explore how SHCS could help your operation call her at : 203-272-5380.)