

# Transit Briefings

An Information Source for the Ohio Transit Industry

## The Customer Doesn't Always Ride Twice: Exceptional Customer Service Ideas for Bottom-Line Results

by Patti Hathaway, CSP

Does your transit system keep increasing and retaining your "choice" riders? Or do you take them for granted? Is convenience all you offer or is there more that brings your riders back?? At the OPTA annual meeting luncheon on May 16th, we discussed ways to provide quality service through T.E.A.M. work.

The first principle is to "Treat customers the way they want to be treated" which is the "platinum rule of success." This is in contrast to the "golden rule" which most of us grew up with, that is "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" or treat people the way you want to be treated. The platinum rule suggests that we must know our customers well enough to know their likes and dislikes ... do you?

Many transit systems survey their customers/riders for input on routes or price increases. Few, if any, systems survey their riders for input on how they were treated by transit employees and what they would like to see be done differently or what transit can do to make their rides more pleasant. If transit systems are truly going to treat their riders the way the riders want to be treated, it is critical to understand what the riders want and expect in the first place.

Exceptional Service is critical with today's demanding customers. Studies indicate that organizations lose 68% of their customers due to a perceived attitude of not caring from the service provider. That is an incredible statistic to think about .. how would that statistic translate for your transit system?? OPTA members attending the luncheon had roundtable discussions about exceptional customer service ideas

within their systems and then shared the best ideas with the entire group.

Some of the ideas that came out of the discussions as well as from discussions Patti had with several OPTA members prior to her keynote, included:

- Instill a customer service "culture" within your system by sharing bus driver stories and special service examples.
- Get outside media attention when drivers show exceptional service so the driver gains acclaim outside of the system and the public becomes aware of these special acts.
- Involve employees in policy making since they will be the people to implement the new policies (i.e. transfer policy).
- Allow drivers and employees to dress up on Christmas and Halloween. Allow them to give out candy and do unique, special things.
- For customer service reps, disregard timing phone calls with new customers so that they can spend as much time as necessary with those people to build rapport and service levels.

Your Attitude determines your Altitude. How management treats employees will make a difference in how those employees deal with your customers/riders. Internal customer service must be emphasized as much as external customer service for truly exceptional service to flourish in a system.

The bottom-line is that every transit employee must learn how to Make a Difference! Some transit systems are considering developing an incentive program or profit sharing program which is based on how well employees provide rider/

customer service. What are you doing to make your employees and riders feel important? What things do you do that make you stand out from other public sector agencies? With federal funding cuts, transit systems may soon live or die by their customers. How would your riders describe your customer service?

If transit systems are going to change the standing joke of "this would be a great job if it weren't for all these riders" ... they will have to learn what Stew Leonard learned, "Customer Service cannot be a sometimes thing. It must be earned and re-earned every single day, in a hundred little ways."

*Patti Hathaway, CSP, helps many organizations achieve their goals by providing customized, substantive, interactive, and energizing keynotes, workshops and seminars. Call Patti at 614-523-3633 for information on her speaking services or to receive her complementary newsletter.*

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