

SBM

The Source for Business Owners

ST. LOUIS
**Small
Business
Monthly**

VOL. 14, ISSUE IV

MAY 2001

Adding Value To Your Products And Services Your People Make The Difference

by Fred Firestone

Tom Peters tells the story of a hurried individual who goes into Beltramo's Liquor Store in Palo Alto, Calif., and presents his American Express card for payment of his purchase. It seems to the customer that American Express takes an inordinate amount of time to approve the transaction. His frustration grows with every second.

With whom is he angry? Not American Express. He's angry at Beltramo's. More specifically, his anger is directed at the clerk behind the counter. Is this rational behavior? Clearly not—Beltramo's and the clerk have done nothing wrong. Notwithstanding how Judge Judy might rule on who is the culpable party, the clerk realizes that the only the judge who matters is the customer. And the clerk is in the process of being tried and possibly convicted unless he takes action. Finally, American Express approves. The insightful employee takes a five-cent mint from behind the counter, puts it in the customer's bag along with his purchase and receipt and says, "I'm sorry you were delayed; it's inexcusable. Thanks for shopping with us." Result: triumphant moment of truth and recovered customer. Cost: five cents.

I worked with a computer distributor who was selling the same products with the same bells and whistles as everyone else in the computer business. In discussing how they differentiated their offerings from others who sold the same products at the same prices, they told me their best differentiator was the person who installed the computer system, who decided to

gently place it, not slam it down, on the customer's table. Their mission statement reflected their attitude: "Our sustainable advantage will come from our people."

A company can spend many dollars on advertising, décor, mission statements and brochures. **The ultimate influencer of service image, however, is the company person you're dealing with.** Do you know anybody who walked into a place of business, looked at the company logo or decor and said, "Wow, that looks great, I'm going to become a customer for life"? I've seen a lot of mission statements and can't recall one that read, "Our sustainable advantage will come from the colors we use in our brochure."

If employees make the difference, the first step is hiring the right person. The second is creating a work environment where employees are motivated to deliver on every moment of truth.

So, if you're fortunate enough to have hired the right people, how do you motivate them to own their moments of truth? **True motivators** are factors that foster an inner desire to work by satisfying certain needs important to the individual. **Maintainers** are factors that must be kept at a satisfactory level in order for employees to maintain performance. A 1995 George Mason University study was conducted in which employees ranked ten factors in terms of the motivational value to them. Managers and supervisors then were asked to rank the same ten factors in terms of how *they thought* their employees would rank them. The results differed. Employees said they were best moti-

vated by: 1. being in an interesting work environment, 2. being fully appreciated for the work they do and 3. feeling that they are in on things. Managers and supervisors said they thought their employees would say they were motivated by: 1. good wages, 2. job security and 3. promotion and growth.

The three factors that managers and supervisors thought were most important to employees are not **motivators** but **maintainers**. Regarding wages, for example, employees want their pay at a level consistent with employees doing similar tasks for other companies. An "inner desire" is not created, however, by good pay. In order to get employees to recognize and deliver on moments of truth, your lifeline to satisfying and keeping customers, you need to do more than "maintain performance."

The more employees feel engaged, involved and appreciated, the more job "ownership" they perceive and the more energy and insight they bring to those crucial moments of truth that influence service image. **If your employees feel motivated—that they have a piece of the rock, they'll take care of your customers and in so doing, will take care of you.**

Does your company successfully differentiate its offerings? E-mail me at sempact@swbell.net.

Fred Firestone is president of Sempact, Inc., a seminar and consulting company working with businesses on how they can further differentiate their offerings