



Engaging the new value seekers

by Phil Bruno

When change is thrust upon us, how we react is key. Welcome to the Great Recession, where everything has changed and the food chain has been shaken, rattled, and rolled.

During the last 10 years, I have specialized in speaking, training, and consulting on the experience economy as it relates to workplace culture and the correlation to customer experience. This experience economy is all about how we make customers “feel” about us. It is no longer about price, or quality of products, or good customer service. Yes, those things do go into it, but it is the totality of those ingredients and more that gains customers’ loyalty.

While conducting focus groups in 2008, I asked four different generations how they intended to react to the impending economic downturn. These four distinctly different groups gave me four different responses, but they all said basically the same thing. Get the most value for the money. No one said stop spending. It dawned on me that the recession economy is all about how we make people feel about the “value” of their experience with us.

In order to spread this valuable information, I needed successful role models to show what they’ve done during the downturn.

Four habits of ineffective people

1. Satisfied with current reality. “We’ll wait this one out. It’s just the way things go sometimes.”
2. Unwilling to change. “They’ll be back, they always come back.”
3. Embrace a heroic leadership model. Waiting for directives and instructions from above.
4. Over-reliance on hope as a strategy. “I hope the market will change. I hope bad things will happen to my competitors.”

Organizations experiencing success

Hilton – By enriching the employee experience, Hilton indirectly enhanced the customer experience and directly influenced the bottom line. On-demand tools now exist for every in-house department at all 230 properties in the continental U.S. Workers now have guidelines on how to do their job readily available when they need it.

Meeting content changed from “What we have to do today” to “How

are we going to get this done today?” thus engaging the employee.

According to Brand Education Director Mark Keidaish, 230 properties have raised customer satisfaction levels 7 percent, and 180 of those properties have raised the revpar index by 10 percent.

“These global brand standards are our attempt to make sure there is some form of consistent interaction that happens with customers, no matter where in the world they are staying with us,” he said.

The Broadmoor Hotel and Conference Center, Colorado Springs, Colo. – When The Broadmoor’s phone started ringing with meeting cancellations, they looked internally and came up with a strategy based on utilizing their strengths. Drawing on the core values of its customers, Steve Bartolin, GM of the 1,200-room property, proclaims on a video on their Web site, “Your meeting is exceptional or it’s free. Period.” What a bold confident statement; the Broadmoor is saying, “We can do this.”

The immediate result was a lightning bolt of energy through the staff. Nine meetings have been booked since the announcement in March. One meeting has taken place, and the Broadmoor passed with excellence.

In another move, marketing efforts were shifted to attract the summer leisure trade. By redirecting the emphasis from price to value of the experience, The Broadmoor “has elevated the dialogue from ‘What good price can you give us?’ to ‘What are the differentiators in your product?’” said David Fine, director of sales and marketing.

Five tactics employed by winners

- Focus on the customers who can and will act.
- Enrich the customer experience.
- Convert trial customers to core customers.
- Enhance your brand.
- Know your product as defined by your customer.

What are you doing now to prepare for where you want to be tomorrow?•

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