

Corporate Health Group's Four Favorite Aha's from ***"Chocolates on the Pillow Aren't Enough: Reinventing the Customer Experience"***

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We all love chocolate. We all love service. And, we all know that healthcare hasn't necessarily been known as customer-centric. Yet, as we at Corporate Health Group read "Chocolates on the Pillow Aren't Enough: Reinventing the Customer Experience" by Jonathan Tisch, we continue to recognize that healthcare can learn from other organizations that have developed a customer experience philosophy that serves as a key differentiator.

"Today's consumers are looking for a relationship with an organization that will truly enrich their lives," writes Tisch, Chairman and CEO of Loews Hotels. Using his own experiences as a hotelier and his observations of high-performing customer-oriented organizations, Tisch demonstrates how companies are breaking away from the crowd to provide customers with experiences that are unique, memorable, delightful, comfortable and deeply rewarding. In short, these companies deliver an experience that leads to loyalty—a rare commodity in these trying economic times.

Just as removing the wrapper on a piece of chocolate reveals a tasty morsel, Tisch provides thought-provoking examples from companies of various industries, sizes and models to bring to life innovative ways to create stronger, longer-lasting ties with customers. While Tisch provides "Your Big Aha's" in each chapter, we've selected a few of our favorites to help you tweak your customer service philosophy while also building your brand, strengthening customer relationships, customizing client experiences and leveraging technology.

Aha #1 – Give your customer both simplicity and flexibility. In today's complex world, customers are overwhelmed with choices. They don't want to deal with a confusing array of options; yet, they want their own needs and preferences to be acknowledged and respected. They demand quality. In fact, quality is expected and assumed in healthcare. Customers look to ease of operation, convenience and personalization to enhance the quality and make their experience satisfying and memorable.

Tisch notes that In-N-Out Burger, a family-owned fast-food chain founded in 1948 as California's first drive-thru hamburger stand, stands strong behind the company's original (and simple) philosophy: "Give customers the freshest, highest quality foods you can buy and provide them with friendly service in a sparkling clean environment." Now with over 200 locations in California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona,

In-N-Out offers virtually the same four main menu items as it did when it first opened. Meanwhile, their competitors have added to—and taken away from—their menus in a desperate effort to retain bored customers and stem declining growth.

Aha #2 – Use technology when you can but give customers a choice for those circumstances that require a face-to-face interaction. To turn one-time customers into lifelong guests, organizations must make entry easy, pleasant and fun. Take a long look at how and where customers first encounter your organization and evaluate how each portal provides an option for personal contact.

Tisch notes that New Jersey-based Commerce Bank, with the tagline of “America’s Most Convenient Bank,” benchmarks itself against non-banking organizations to compare customer welcome and follow-up standards. Because not everyone is comfortable with online banking, Commerce locations are open seven days a week, have extended hours during the week and are open on most typical bank holidays. They practice what they call the “10-minute rule” in which they open 10 minutes ahead of schedule and close 10 minutes late to make customers feel more comfortable and welcome. Their philosophy is to provide physical locations where people can bank at *their* convenience.

Aha #3 – Give your customers good reasons to enjoy and expand their loyalty. Every organization has a solid base of loyal, satisfied customers. Rather than chasing elusive and expensive new prospects, focus on reinforcing and expanding existing relationships. Create customer communities that allow your loyal members to become your best marketing tools while also meeting their need for a human connection.

Tisch cites Harley-Davidson as a great example of why and how to focus on existing customers. Struggling with declining sales and layoffs, Harley refocused its efforts in 1989 by concentrating on what makes it unique: its heritage that had made Harley *the* motorcycle to most Americans. Under new leadership, 80% of the advertising, promotion and public relations budget was targeted toward existing customers. The company knew if it provided a value experience to existing customers they would become the best sales force, and that’s exactly what happened. Harley moved from just being a vehicle into a lifestyle centered around values that millions of Americans yearn for. It also created the Harley Owners Group (HOG), an organization to help educate new motorcyclists into the Harley mystique and lifestyle while creating engaged and loyal customers. How many of your employees wear your logo as their tattoo?

Aha #4 – Broaden your focus to take in the whole customer experience. Instead of focusing on your traditional areas of expertise, look at how you can establish deep and lasting connections with your customers by considering every aspect of the customer experience. From initial contact and arriving at the location to waiting for the experience and receiving the end product, little things can mean a lot when customers find it all too easy to abandon your organization for another just by clicking on, phoning or visiting the competitor across the street.

Recognizing these challenges, many museums have reinvented the visitor's experience by offering new, unexpected, varied, lively and interactive displays that attract and retain the interests of a new generation of museum-goers. Tisch points out that the Denver Art Museum redesigned much of its exhibit space to allow multiple viewing angles of artifacts while providing audiotapes in English and Spanish and touchable objects that broke down the perception that museums are old fashioned, irrelevant and uninviting. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has three different restaurants, including one that was awarded three stars by *The New York Times*. Their goal is to provide a visitor experience that expands interaction with (and revenues for) their organization while making the visit more enjoyable, comfortable and memorable.

Our biggest aha? Eat that chocolate instead of putting it on the pillow! Tisch does a great job of providing a variety of examples and industries that gives every reader a new "chocolate" to build deeper and more mutually beneficial connections with your customers!