

# MARKETING SAVVY:

## Exceeding Your Promise

### Lessons Learned from the Rolling Stones

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Think about what you've promised to your customers. Is it timely service? 24/7 access? Expert patient care? Prompt communication of results?

How you describe your service to a customer—and the implicit expectations that result from that encounter—are linked to whether or not your customers differentiate your organization from others in the community.

Think about what makes you different. Do you meet and exceed your customers' expectations? What makes them say "wow?" When was the last time you heard superlatives describe their experience with you, if ever?

### **The Ultimate in Brand Loyalty**

For a classic example of exceeding expectations, look at the recent Rolling Stones concerts. Have you ever stopped to wonder what's the enduring draw of a group that's spanned more than 40 years in the music business? What keeps generations of people coming back? The music? The quality of the live concerts? The charisma of the group's members? It's all of those and more. Let's take a closer look:

- They clearly craft the expectations. If you've ever been to a Rolling Stones concert, there are qualities that distinguish it from others in the music business. Concertgoers have come to expect:
  - great music (the product or service);
  - great backdrops and special effects (the service environment);
  - flawless execution (the process); and
  - extra surprises (the "wow" factor).

When you go to see the Stones, you spend a lot of money. But you do so because the synergy of product, environment, process, and wow factor creates value for you and makes the high cost of admission worth every cent.

- They innovate. A band like this wouldn't be around today if they just kept singing the same old songs. They're innovative—they don't just keep up with the trends, they create the trends.
- They over-deliver. It's the extras that solidify the memorable experience. At a Stones concert, post-encore fireworks give fans a memorable send-off. This one last gesture of gratitude engenders conversations about the amazing performance. Concertgoers feel valued and recognized.
- They're consistent in their delivery. The Rolling Stones have defined a goal (outstanding fan experience), and have clearly aligned and focused resources in order to deliver a consistent performance in every venue. It doesn't happen by accident. The great concert-going experience happens through a clearly defined, rehearsed, and executed plan that delivers time, after time, after time.

- They follow up. It's not enough to guess people had a good time. Follow-up is an important element in knowing what worked or didn't work in each venue, and what should be changed next time. The Stones organization gathers feedback through its web site and newsletter, and by tracking performance measures like album and ticket sales. Feedback is routinely shared with concertgoers and other fans.

So, you've seen how a rock-and-roll band of 60-something performers does it. Now, let's look at how these same principles can apply to your occupational health program.

### **Clearly Craft Expectations**

Presumably, your companies want to make their workplaces—and hence, their workforces—healthier.

Here are some ways for setting that expectation.

- Use staff to send the right messages. Ensure staff is trained on service delivery messages. Make sure every member of your internal team is conveying a standard of what customers should expect when doing business with your organization.
- Define the service expectation. Be clear about what the patient should expect (e.g., wait times, what happens during an examination) and what the employer should expect (e.g., reports, frequency of communication).
- Define the environment of care. Take a close look at your physical space, what environment you're trying to create, how your staff interacts with your customers, and how staff can be trained to go the extra mile to meet the customers' needs.
- Define the processes that are in place. Examine how you'll not only deliver what you've promised, but exceed expectations. Perhaps it's Internet access in the waiting area, or an on-demand bill. Listen to your customers and figure out what will wow them.

### **Innovate**

What are you doing today that's different from how you were delivering service last year? Have you created an environment that challenges you and your team to keep doing it better? Or are you still plugging along with the same old expectations and standards?

Granted, there will always be a core of offerings that won't change. And there are certainly rules and regulations that govern what can and can't be done. But, through it all, you have to find the opportunity to be different, to be better than the rest. Here are some examples of innovations you could consider:

- provide on-site services tailored to employer needs;
- make medical information available via computer link to expedite the hiring process; and
- automate the medical record for ease of access to information.

### **Over-Deliver**

Over-delivering doesn't have to be costly. But it does mean you have to make a consistent effort to do more than what the customer expects, thus adding value to the relationship.

What makes you different from other providers? Is it that the sales staff is proactive about meeting with customers to address utilization? Is it that patients don't wait for hours in the exam room after they've been taken from the waiting room? Is it that they receive discharge instructions and follow-up paperwork in a coordinated packet of information so they don't have to piece it all together later? Is it that the employer receives prompt follow-up after that day's visit?

Define over-delivery in accordance to what makes sense in your market and apply it

consistently across customers. Ask them what they expect. Look at the gaps between what you're delivering and what they told you they want. Determine what you must deliver and what can be over-delivered.

### **Be Consistent**

Patients and companies have the right to expect a consistent experience with you. Can you guarantee each patient will receive the same level of care across venues, providers, and times of day? Or, are there inconsistencies in service depending upon patient volume or level and mood of staff? The rule of thumb here: if you can't guarantee consistency, there's something wrong with your process.

In order to be consistent, you must first define the deliverables and then obsessively measure against them. If you say no one will wait more than five minutes before being seen, then put a process in place to live up to and measure that promise.

### **Follow Up**

The funny thing about expectations is that they change over time. Stay closely connected to those you serve, and when expectations change, adapt your practices to meet the new expectations.

Be aware that hundreds of things in your program (both large and small), impact your customers. Constant follow-up and re-tooling keep you current about meeting expectations and provide you with the platform to exceed expectations.

Being a zealot about delivering consistent service quality is the only way to be able to exceed your promise. Understanding customers' needs, consistently delivering on your promises, and providing the wow factor earn the loyalty needed to sustain a program in the long term. With the right focus and energy on these elements, your program can excel.



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