

WOW Your Customers with World-Class Service

By Catherine Baumgardner, Corporate Health Group

Think about a time when you've experienced world-class service. Was it at a department store, a restaurant, with a healthcare provider? Now think about what made that experience a "WOW" for you. Most likely, what you remember most is not just what service you received, but more importantly how it made you *feel*.

Getting to WOW

WOW service doesn't just happen. Rather, it's the result of a consistent and undying commitment to delivering service to the customer that is unparalleled. It's service that is beyond business as usual—service that is indeed memorable.

Being memorable occurs at each point of customer contact and is constantly reinforced; therefore, every step and every point of contact is a part of the portfolio of experiences that make up the impression of your service. Getting to WOW is about understanding those relationships and building an organization that lives that commitment every time.

It All Starts with a Spark

Think about a fireworks display. You see the darkness of the night, punctuated by stars and you hear the low voices of excitement as people wait for the show to begin. You see the wonder in their eyes, jaws slack with amazement as the colors whirl and swirl in the air. Then there's the soft but so powerful sound of the "oohs" and "aahs."

Isn't that the sense of amazement that you want your customers to have when they do business with you? We know that patients aren't coming for enjoyment, but we do know we want them to say, "I won't go anywhere else." That loyalty is what WOW is all about.

To take that fireworks display from a spark to an entire show, to move your service levels from good to WOW requires all of these elements:

Customer Intelligence—Know in detail what each and every one of your customers wants, each time they have an encounter with you. It's not enough to provide service to the masses. To get to WOW, you must provide service tailored to the individual's need and circumstances.

Passionate Employees—Not just employees that show up for work each day, but employees that care deeply and see themselves as connected to your organization. They need to be fully engaged in what you do and understand their role in helping you to get there.

A Winning Team—Knowledge and a few strong employees will not create WOW. It's the team of people being guided by those principles that keeps it all pulled together and ultimately helps you to deliver WOW.

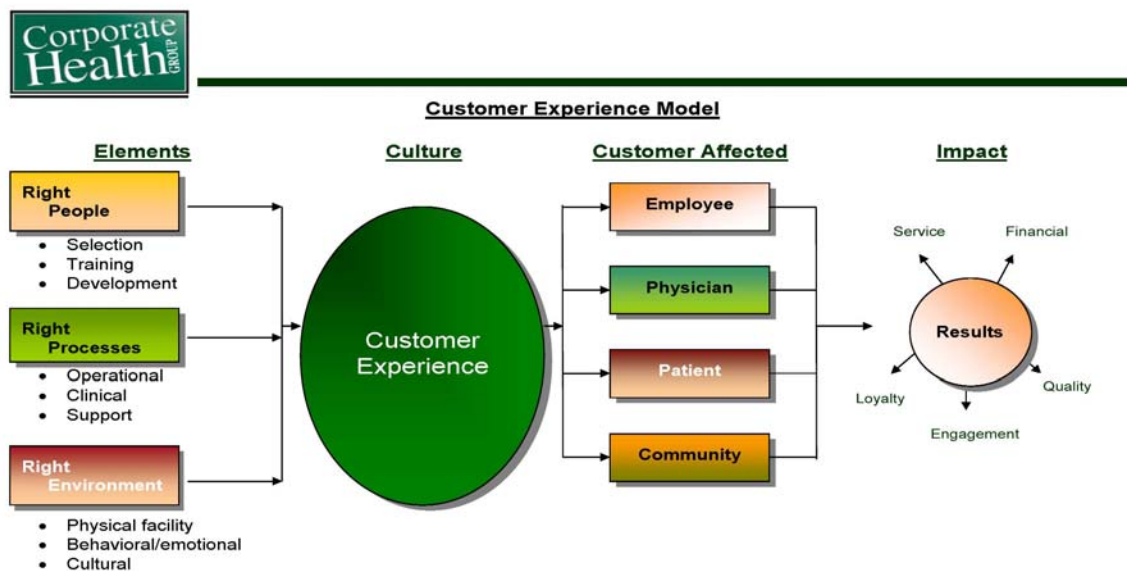
In order to have perspective on these elements of WOW, it's important to understand the following customer expectation: "Quality is a baseline expectation...what people remember and return for, is how you made them feel along the way." They expect quality. They expect that they are going to receive the care for which they have come.

But, what they judge about you and your facility is how you made them feel. The way that they were treated, the way that they felt, and ultimately the way that you let them know at that moment in time that they were the most important person in the world to you.

Understand the Customer Experience

Part of getting to WOW is understanding how the customer experience all fits together. A great customer experience is all about having the right elements in place: the right people, the right processes and the right environment.

The right person can only overcome a poor process for so long, and vice versa. The key is having the pieces in balance and in alignment with the organization's goal to create WOW—then, you're well on your way!



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The 3 Steps to WOW

1. *Customer Intelligence*

According to the Press Ganey 2007 *Hospital Pulse Report*, patient satisfaction for both inpatients and outpatients has been increasing steadily for the past four years. Overall scores are now in the low 80s and the low 90s respectively. One could infer that the increase in scores is due largely to the incredible focus that customer service has had upon the industry. However, while the scores are increasing, it does beg one to wonder if the low 80s and high 90s are enough for WOW. The answer, however, is no.

In order to really be at WOW-worthy levels, that translates to patient loyalty, scores optimally should be in the high 90s. According to the majority of the survey company feedback, the areas that most influence overall satisfaction are:

- Responsiveness
- Staff sensitivity
- Inclusion in decisions
- Emotional needs
- Information
- Teamwork
- Ability to ask questions
- Comfort

In the midst of all the data that you collect, focusing on and improving even one of these areas will have great impact on your overall satisfaction and outcomes. In addition to looking at the survey data, ask questions of your patients. Perhaps part of the greeting is finding out what they expect of the visit. Know their fears: Understanding what they're expecting will help you to tailor your approach, and hence their experience.

Use your patients as sounding boards. Bring them together in discussion groups, create advisory panels, invite them to planning sessions—whatever it takes to get their input. They are happy to help you to design the care delivery model that will be most appealing to them! Being proactive and staying ahead of the curve is what helps you to create WOW service.

2. *Passionate Employees*

Passionate employees are “engaged” employees, people who see themselves as extensions of your organization. These are the kind of employees that you want to attract, retain and develop because they're going to be the best reflection on your organization.

You can think of employees in three different categories: *Mountain Movers, Mountain Climbers and Mountain Campers*:

- *Mountain Movers* will do whatever it takes to “make it right” for the customer. They take it very personally when the customer is unhappy with them or the organization. They will literally move mountains to do the right thing, and will enjoy doing it!
- *Mountain Climbers* are those you can depend upon every day to do their jobs. Their attitudes are positive, they are team players and you can depend upon them for a job well done. Unlike the movers, they will often look for a bit more permission before they move the mountain, but will do so once they know they have encouragement and free rein.
- *Mountain Campers* see the mountain and decide that rather than move it or climb it, they’re just going to camp on it. They are your employees who typically do just what they need to do to get the job done, are often resistant to change, and see their jobs as just that—jobs. Because of their resistance and lack of movement, they’re often the employees you spend the most time with. (Imagine for a moment what you could accomplish in WOW service if you could shift that time and energy to your movers and climbers.)

Consider your own team breakout and what steps you can take to shift your mix. Creating a culture based on delivering WOW service is one of the most effective ways to send a message about what’s valued in your culture. How you select and orient your team, as well as the accountabilities you build in, will have great impact.

3. *A Winning Team*

Having passionate employees is important, but unless they work together toward the same goal, you just have passionate employees. To create this winning team culture, it’s important to focus your team on a foundation built upon a well articulated and lived Vision, Mission and Values set.

Your vision answers the question, “What is possible?”; your mission answers the question, “Why does this matter?”; and your values represent the beliefs or behaviors that guide your organization.

The key to creating the winning team is having everyone on your team know, understand and live these tenets. Without this understanding, you won’t get the passion that will be the spark that leads you to WOW service. You create this passion by setting clear goals so that everyone knows where they are headed, defining accountabilities so that everyone knows and understands their role in helping to get there, and obtaining their personal commitment to helping you to get there.

A deliberate and continuous commitment to creating and sustaining a culture focused on the customer is the catalyst for achieving WOW service. Chance is not a strategy.

What’s Next?

As you consider where to go next, start by really understanding what your patients want. Examine the team you have on your journey. Identify the key things that you will need in the short and long term and what you need to do to have the passionate employee and to build the winning team. After all, we know that patients would rather not receive healthcare, but if they must, we want them to say, “WOW, when I need healthcare again, I don’t want to go anywhere else!”

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