

People Are Your Greatest Asset - Rubbish!

The Right People Are Your Greatest Asset.



Author: Colin Shaw, Founder of Beyond Philosophy






Beyond Philosophy Services:

Beyond Philosophy is recognized as the worlds thought leaders in Customer Experience. We have written three international bestselling books on the subject. Formed in 2002, Beyond Philosophy works internationally with organizations such as IBM, FedEx and American Express to name a few, from our offices are in London, England and Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

We help improve our clients Customer Experience by harnessing our knowledge and experience of practical implementation around the globe. We have proven expertise in de-risking implementations, increase speed of project delivery and saving costs through our engagements. Our tools and techniques are renowned for their practical application and have been tried and tested in many sectors.

Our services are:

Strategic Guidance – We work with all levels of management in an organization and guide them on the decisions that need to be taken to improve their Customer Experience. We start by asking three key strategic questions:

-  What is the Customer Experience you are trying to deliver?
-  What emotions are you trying to evoke?
-  Is your Customer Experience deliberate?

Our consultants work with the organizations to answer these key questions and put in place actions that will improve the organizations revenues, retain customers and save costs.

Training – We have well developed training programs for organizations from senior leadership to front line people. We also have developed specific training for Customer Experience professionals, whom we train and certify on our tolls and techniques. We believe in “experiential” training, getting the delegate to feel what their Customer Experience is really like. We use real-life case studies to demonstrate our key points.

Market Insight and research – We specialize in conducting Customer insight on the subconscious and emotional aspects of the Customer Experience. We have developed models, with London Business School, that can predict revenue benefit an organization can enjoy through improving their experience. We put in place measurement tools that can measure the total Customer Experience.

Conference speaking – We have a team of people who deliver high quality conference speeches around the globe on how to improve your Customer Experience.



People Are Your Greatest Asset --Rubbish! ... The Right People Are Your Greatest Asset.

The companies recognized in the Times '100 Best Companies to Work For 2004' survey have put in a great deal of effort to achieve this. They know that employing the right people and creating the right environment will absolutely affect your Customer Experience. In my experience, most organizations spend more time in caging their people in than they do in freeing their potential.

Let me give you an example of this. When I was working for one of the world's largest blue chip companies a number of years ago, I took over the management of a team of Customer Service people. The Customer Experience that they were delivering had been poor for some time and previous managers had not been able to improve this. One customer told me; "It's like dealing with robots, they are just going through the motions, without really caring."

As I did my normal 'walking the job', the Customer Service people were surprised to see me. It turned out that they had not seen a senior manager who just wanted to talk to them for some time. The people told me that when previous senior managers did visit, they practiced 'Seagull Management'. They would fly in, make a lot of noise, annoy the people and fly out again.

The Customer Service people were very quiet and clearly did not speak their minds, they didn't feel loved. If they didn't feel loved, I asked myself; "How could they love their Customers"? I therefore arranged a number of activities to show that I cared and would listen to them including site visits, 'free speech lines', games during the day, social events in the evenings, competitions and charity events. As I got to know them I could really start to see the potential in these people. I encouraged them to take risks for the customer and assured them there would be no repercussions if their actions went wrong. I removed layers of bureaucracy, removed managers that did not have the right leadership behaviors, encouraged and supported people's decisions and tried to put some fun into the workplace. I was trying to free them to serve the customer and thus improve the Customer Experience. It was a long, hard slog.

As the months progressed and the situation improved, I was reflecting on work one day as I sat in my garden watching my kids play with their rabbits, 'Dibs' and 'Dobs'. The rabbits had always surprised me. When I took them out of the cage and placed them on the ground, I always expected them to go 'Whoohoo, I'm free' and start to run around the garden at full speed. But they didn't. Every time I released them, Dibs, after a while of thinking about it would take a few steps into the garden very cautiously. He would stop, have a good look around and then proceed very tentatively. Dobs, the other Rabbit, would look around and then run back to the cage. He clearly preferred it there, it was much safer. As I sat in the garden thinking about the last year I came to the conclusion that my people were like my kid's rabbits! Over the years, the previous poor management and the company culture had built a cage around the people. I had



come in, opened the cage and expected them to run around shouting 'I'm free' and perform to their full potential, but they didn't. It took time. It took time for them to realize there wasn't any danger in the garden. It took time for my people to realize that I was serious and for them to trust me. It turned out that like Dobs, some of the people did actually prefer the cage. They liked the structure. They liked not having to think, they liked just coming to work and going home without having to use their brain. These people eventually found my new culture was not for them and left. Other people blossomed and eventually did run around the garden. Some even ventured out of the garden and down the road and developed into senior managers themselves!

During this period, the Customer Experience improved by some 17%. Employee satisfaction went from 61 % to 91%. Productivity rose by 29%. People were having fun, they knew they could use their own brains and make decisions and they would be backed up if it went wrong. It's an overused phrase but they were empowered. It's how you react when things go wrong, not when they are going right that is critical. To explain this clearly, I coined a phrase: **"Happy people give you happy Customers"**.

The companies recognized in the Times '100 Best Companies to Work for 2004' survey understand this.

About the Author

Colin Shaw is the Founder of Beyond Philosophy, a consultancy, training and Customer research organization. They are recognized as thought leaders in the Customer Experience and are located in London, England and Atlanta, Georgia USA. Colin is an International bestselling author and widely acclaimed public speaker. For further information on the Customer Experience, and to read Colin's blog and videos, please visit Beyond Philosophy at www.beyondphilosophy.com