

Delivering Ahead of the Curve

By CLAUDINE ELLIOTT, NEOPOST USA WITH NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

Excellent customer service begins with an “employee-first mentality,” according to Wayne Roeder, Vice President of Service Operations with Neopost USA. While the company places customers at the center of its products and services, its employees are equally valued. Neopost is active in encouraging a culturally diverse staff, exceeds health and safety standards to assure the highest quality work environment, and partners with employees to support their charitable activities. The result is an efficient, forward-thinking organization able to adapt to the changing behavior of its customers.

Neopost has been designing and providing postal and related digital communications solutions for 90 years. Headquartered in Milford, CT, with 200 offices nationwide comprised of independent dealers, company-owned dealers and retail locations, Neopost USA provides over 430 jobs in Connecticut, and 1,600 jobs across the country.



**2012 Service Business
of the Year
Neopost USA**



Neopost USA employees enthusiastically live the “golden rule” when it comes to serving their valued customers.

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Roeder came from the copier business to Neopost three and a half years ago, bringing with him “process, structure and employee development and empowerment.” Since then, Roeder has helped implement a customer experience management system—a program designed to carefully track how customers perceive their experience with Neopost.

Employee Engagement

With 280,000 customers and considerable daily transactions, Neopost recognizes the importance of appreciating its employees. To stay connected to how employees perceive they are being treated by the company, Neopost conducts employee engagement surveys every two years. As Roeder explains, “When our employees are engaged then it directly impacts accountability in customer service.”

Philosophy of Customer Service

The Golden Rule governs at Neopost. “We try our best to treat our customers like partners. We treat them the way we would want to be treated,” Roeder reports. “Our customer experience management program allows us to see exactly how our customers perceive their experience with us. This, in turn, allows us to respond expeditiously to ‘hot’ issues that come from our surveys. It also allows us to identify root cause issues and adjust on a broader scale those that may be creating poor customer experiences. We measure and track everything, but we dig deeper. We assure that we understand the customers’ experience, and we don’t let metrics drive our decisions which would sacrifice this experience.”

Public Commitment to Excellent Customer Service

Neopost’s main slogan, as displayed at the top of their website, is: “We Value Your Mail.” In addition, a program called “Neopost to the power of me,” or Neopost^{me}, highlights six internal value propositions, including customer centricity. All employees are trained extensively in these six key behaviors to empower them with excellent customer service skills.

In line with the company’s philosophy of being close to the customers, each local market is permitted to publi-

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cize the results of their own customer satisfaction surveys. This allows customers to know exactly what to expect from the local market service organization.

Employee Incentives

Several recognition programs are in place at Neopost to inspire and reward its employees for providing superior customer service. In the "Neostar awards program," employees commended by internal and external customers are honored during quarterly "town hall" company meetings. Customer survey results are also incorporated into employee performance reviews, as a regular source of feedback. Another service awards program rewards excelling employees with a Tiffany's item of their choice. Many other internal programs and campaigns are set up to help Neopost value its employees as a priority.

Challenges

Some of the challenges Neopost faces include a decline in mailing, increased competition and alternative processes. However, as Roeder attests, "we don't allow this to get in the way of our customer experience." With a variety of programs designed to encourage employees to excel in customer service, and an adap-



At Neopost USA the first word is customer. The last word is commitment.

tive, responsive attitude toward growth, Neopost is well equipped to overcome any industry challenges and continue to flourish as it has for nearly a century.

The National Customer Service Association congratulates Neopost USA the 2012 All-Star Service Business Award Winner! ■

Claudine Elliot is the Manager, Public Relations and Strategic Communications for Neopost USA.

Nivi Nagiel is an NCSA Editor.

Welcome to the Family

By MARK DENNIS, CARLOS O'KELLY'S WITH NICK PAPPAS, NCSA

Carlos O'Kelly's is a "fantastic, family-based company," according to Mark Dennis, General Manager of the Bloomington branch of the restaurant chain. A family flavor that extends from the company owners down to each customer has been the key to the success for this popular eatery.

History

The business started over 30 years ago as a Mexican cantina in Iowa, opened by two brothers, David and Darrell Rolph. John Rolph is the current President of Carlos O'Kelly's. Today, the company, now based in Wichita, Kansas, includes 39 restaurants in the Midwest and Virginia serving Inspired Mex food, with over 2,000 employees companywide. The



The "All-Star" Award winning Carlos O'Kelly team stands ready to provide Service Excellence to every customer.



2012 Service Team of the Year Carlos O'Kelly's

Bloomington restaurant has been open for 15 years, and has about 40 employees.

One of the ways Carlos O'Kelly's binds its family is by growing employees to promote from within. Dennis is a prime example of this philosophy. He has been with the company for 19 years starting as a server, moving up to supervisor, then manager, and has been the General Manager of the Bloomington restaurant for the past 10 years.

Culture

A team-oriented culture is promoted and encouraged within the employee group. According to the employees at the Bloomington restaurant, "Everyone gets along very well" which is no little accomplishment when an employer such as Carlos O'Kelly's has numerous part- and full-time employees of varying age ranges and working schedules that find them coming in and out of one another's lives depending on the schedule. The lines of communication throughout the company remain open at all times. Dennis is welcome to speak directly with the owners of the company to discuss problems or ask questions, and all

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Carlos O’Kelly’s employees provide that “keep them coming back” customer service.

employees are invited to call the home office with any issues that arise.

Philosophy of Customer Service

Dennis loves his job, in part, because he loves the customer service aspect of the business. “Everything we do as a company is focused on the customer experience. We want to provide great hospitality so that customers keep coming back.”

Carlos O’Kelly’s places particular emphasis on ensuring that each employee is trained in excellent customer service. All new employees must pass a strict training program to bring them up to speed with the philosophy of the company and to equip them with superior customer service skills.

The results of this training, combined with the fact that the employees love to get to know their customers, are palpable. Sixty percent of the customers at the Bloomington restaurant are regulars, a testament to the strength of the employees’ customer service skills. As Dennis explains, the company instructs its employees to “create Carlos O’Kelly’s advocates.” And the statistics show they do.

Implementation

To monitor and support the company’s high customer

service expectations, the four managers at the Bloomington restaurant constantly provide feedback to employees, making sure it is clear and specific.

Excellent customer service is expected from employees at every level in the company. Performance evaluations are given twice a year to each employee, and promotions are always a possibility. In this way, employees have an incentive to continually provide excellent service and to strive to improve.

Cyclical Benefits

Establishing personal connections with customers contributes to the family atmosphere at Carlos O’Kelly’s that is enjoyed by both customers and employees, and keeps patrons loyal. As Dennis says, “I love to see customers come in constantly over the years—I feel I get to know everyone on a personal level. It is a great feeling. Hiring employees and seeing them move up in the company is also a great thing for me to watch and a huge part of my job.”

Challenges

There are always challenges in running a consistently successful restaurant, Dennis acknowledges. But that places all the more importance on the need for the business to provide an exceptional experience for the customer, and create that inviting family environment that has kept customers coming back to Carlos O’Kelly’s for decades.

The National Customer Service Association congratulates Carlos O’Kelly’s as the 2012 All-Star Service Team Award Winner! ■

Mark Dennis is General Manager, Carlos O’Kelly’s, Bloomington, Illinois.

Nick Pappas is an NCSA Customer Service Team Member.

Where the Heart Is

By DEBRA JOHNSON, PINELLAS COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY WITH NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

Excellent customer service comes naturally when you are “doing right, because it is the right thing to do.” This is how Christopher Benjamin, of the Pinellas County Housing Authority (PCHA), describes his approach to his job.

The PCHA was formed in 1965 as an independent agency “dedicated to creating, providing and increasing high quality housing opportunities” in Pinellas County, Florida. The PCHA, located in Largo, Florida, is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the Governor of Florida, and has about 80 employees.

Benjamin, a college student with previous experience in retail and as a tutor with America Reads, joined PCHA in November 2010. He was originally hired as a temporary, part-time clerical employee. Today he participates in several family self-sufficiency programs at PCHA, and has been recognized twice over the course of his PCHA employment for providing excellent external customer service, nominated by both his co-workers and very satisfied customers.

In his tenure at PCHA, Benjamin has developed far more than clerical skills. He is now adept at identifying the myriad of issues presented by both current and prospective customers and responding appropriately and respectfully to provide optimal assistance with every interaction.

A Culture of Excellence

The employees at PCHA aspire to excel at both their jobs and their relationships with co-workers. Their motto is: “In Search of Excellence.” Employees “strive to treat each other in a positive manner by stimulating positive conversations, offering help when needed, and commending their fellow coworkers for doing a good job,” Benjamin reports.

Internal customer service is vital at PCHA, in part, because the company is entrusted with millions of federal dollars. Accordingly, it is critical that employees remain knowledgeable, professional, and



**2012 Service Individual
of the Year
*Christopher Benjamin***



Christopher Benjamin takes great pride in providing the very best in customer service to every customer—every time.

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accurate in order to best serve the various populations receiving subsidized or affordable housing through the PCHA.

Philosophy of Customer Service

The philosophy of customer service at PCHA is “to go above and beyond” in assisting customers and meeting their needs. To the public, PCHA pledges to serve as “effective stewards of its financial resources by doing right, because it is the right thing to do.”

In the day-to-day operation of the business, this philosophy is played out via the friendly, non-judgmental assistance employees provide to customers, whether in person, by phone or by email.

PCHA leadership provides training to support and foster the excellent customer service skills expected of its staff, and continuously monitors these skills by incorporating customer service as an assessment tool on employee performance evaluations.

Employees that shine in customer service are rewarded with recognition at monthly board meetings and annual year-end luncheons, and with awards such as a “Certificate of Appreciation Award,” and “Star Performer Award,” accompanied by a gold lapel pin and gift card.

And the business as a whole is rewarded for its exemplary customer service with positive letters, calls,

notes, and emails sent in appreciation and gratitude to the Executive Director and staff.

Challenges

Many customers contact PCHA already agitated due to incorrect information from a variety of other sources. This can present a challenge to PCHA staff. Benjamin, who sits at the reception desk, is often the first employee to interact with customers, and is, therefore, called upon to alleviate customer stress that is present as they walk in the door. Benjamin does so by skillfully assessing the customers’ needs, providing accurate information, and representing PCHA as the All-Stars in customer service that they are.

As Benjamin explains, “effective and responsive management... [and] our ability to cultivate strategic partnerships and develop innovative programs allows us to bring together services and resources to assist our families in working toward self-sufficiency.” Benjamin is a real-life example of how that plays out with respect for all customers every day.

The National Customer Service Association congratulates Christopher Benjamin as the 2012 All-Star Service Individual Award Winner! ■

Debra Johnson is the Executive Director of the Pinellas County Housing Authority.

Nivi Nagiel is an NCSA Editor.