

“HAPPY CUSTOMERS, WINNING FIRM”

As an astute observer of the corporate world, Philippe Bloch puts recipes for successful management forward in his works and conferences. With staff well-being, happy customers and thus the firm's success as its ultimate achievement!

YOU ENCOURAGE COMPANY STAFF TO BEHAVE AS “INTRAPRENEURS”. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

It means that employees behave like entrepreneurs within their company. In other words, it's about taking risks, being audacious and assuming your responsibilities. In fact nowadays, politics often get in the way of pragmatism. This is a mistake! We work in a complex, uncertain environment and to succeed you have to cultivate a spirit of enterprise and remain creative. The expression “Think big” sums it up: in a firm, sharing a vast project helps in solving difficulties.

HOW DOES THE ATTENTION YOU PAY YOUR STAFF LEAD TO QUALITY CUSTOMER CARE?

Firms have realised that keeping your customer satisfied is tough when the person serving them is not happy doing it. This is why it's important to treat your employees like they're your key accounts. My experience at Columbus Café, which I founded in 1994, strengthened my conviction. By paying attention to our staff, devoting time and energy to them, we have managed to pass our positive attitude on to them, which they in turn pass on to the customers. It's a kind of virtuous circle. There are tons of ways of showing consideration for other human beings. It's up to each manager to find their own.

HOW HAS THE DIGITAL ECONOMY SHAPED CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS?

It has already started to modify our behaviour, but this is only the beginning. We have become extremely impatient and demanding, and we don't understand why, in real life, everything is so complicated when it's so very simple on Internet! Unlimited access to information means we can find out everything about a product before purchasing it. For example: before buying a car at a showroom, customers will have viewed it in 3D, read user accounts in forums and so on.

PHILIPPE BLOCH
author and conference speaker

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Founder of Columbus Café, Philippe Bloch is the author of best-sellers *Service compris*, *Dinosaures & Caméléons* and *Bienheureux les Fêlés*. He is also a programme presenter on BFM Business and BFM TV, and a columnist for *l'Entreprise*. To date, he has spoken at over 2,500 conferences in France and Europe. His latest book, *Service compris 2.0*, was published in February 2011.



In short, they know a lot, they even think they know more than the sales force! So brands have to gear up and offer what Internet can't: an attractive, pleasant showroom, in which the customer experience will be a source of pleasure.

WHAT ARE, IN YOUR OPINION, THE GOLDEN RULES FOR MANAGEMENT FOR SUCCESSFUL SERVICE?

Setting a good example is the first, basic rule. Applying to yourself what you expect of others. The second is to hire staff who are “bigger than you”, hire talent that will help you grow. You also have to delegate, empowering staff to take initiatives and decisions without systematically having to refer to a senior. This also involves giving them the right to make mistakes. Lastly, what may seem obvious: thanking and congratulating them. Words which are always pleasant

to hear... yet which are rare, whereas you never hesitate to let people know when things go wrong.

AS A SEASONED OBSERVER OF THE CORPORATE WORLD, WHAT ARE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF CFAO?

At the congress I attended last May, I perceived a strong entrepreneurial culture in the firm. Africa is a tough continent, and this is perhaps why staff learn more than elsewhere how to come up with inventive solutions and think outside the box to develop their business. Geographic decentralisation of business, via the many subsidiaries, also encourages the entrepreneurial spirit. I was also struck by how keen staff were: I saw people who were happy to be there, together, listening to each other. ■