

Starbucks Takes Training Seriously

By Mark Aruda

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While catching the early morning news the other day, I was astonished to hear the headline that Starbucks is closing nationwide for three hours to train its 135,000 store employees on the art of coffee making and the ultimate customer experience.

Wow! I have been a training professional for over 25 years and this announcement is monumental to our profession. A company actually talks about the importance of training, stop the presses!

Training is often the 800 pound corporate gorilla that never gets addressed, yet needs to be. Many businesses fail based upon their lack of building an effective and ongoing internal training program. Since training is considered an expense to most companies, its importance is low on the corporate totem-pole.

Finally, through this announcement, a well-known and profitable company has given us a peek behind the corporate curtain and revealed that lower sales and unhappy customers could be related to a training issue. Kudos to Starbucks for stepping up to the plate and addressing this situation. And cheers to them for making a marketing event around it. How often do we hear about other companies' staff training events? NEVER.

Telling the world you need to devote time training is a great positive, because it reveals you know the secret to success - it's your people! A well trained staff and happy customer experience help drive company profitability.

How did Starbucks determine they needed additional training? Well, they didn't ask me, but if they followed standard training industry processes, here are the steps they might have taken. First, they would analyze their volumes of data to determine who their target audience is. This is known as demographics.

Often large companies will turn demographics into fictional people and create a story around them to help staff to better visualize their customer needs. For example: A typical young mother with 2 children under the age of four visits the store between the hours of 8:30am - 10:30am. So they will give this group a name, Chloe. And business professionals will be descending upon the store between 6:00 to 7:30am. Perhaps this group will be called Ciara. Each story will tell what products these people ask for most and what customer experience they expect.

When building the training program objectives, they will address the individual needs of Chloe and Ciara. The key to sound training programs revolves around meeting the needs of your target audience.

The next step is to teach staff members what you want them to say and do. This should be a step-by-step process that is repeated several times. Repetition builds

knowledge, confidence and skills.

Now they know the expectations, it is time for the learner to practice their new skills. Using case studies about Chloe and Ciara will help to reinforce the key learning strategies determined in the objectives. When working through real problems, learners become problem solvers. The key to highly successful customer service is to create problem solvers.

Finally, the trainer might have asked for learner feedback so any questions can be addressed then in real time.

I predict the net result of this three-hour training intervention will create a mad rush to your local Starbucks, just like the mood we experience on the day after Thanksgiving. We Starbucks groupies will wake up and literally run to be the first in line to benefit from the well-trained barista's abilities to wow us with that perfect latte and service with a smile. I want to taste the fruits of the training intervention first-hand and affirm my training profession.

Thank you Starbucks for elevating the corporate training experience to a new level and I'll have a Grande Caramel Macchiato extra hot.