

How to meet the quality expectations of customers

THE service sector has gained prominence as one of the key players in economic growth and development. Key players have enjoyed growth over years. They range from providers of financial, telecommunications and hospitality services. They strive to meet customers' expectations. This ensures loyalty and market share growth.

To meet customers' expectations, they regularly review the quality of their services. Service quality is the difference between customers' expectation and perceived service. Customer satisfaction occurs when the expectation and perception of service are at par.

Where expectations are greater than performance, customer dissatisfaction occurs and this may affect the company's credibility and turnover. In any business environment, be it manufacturing or provision of services, there will always be service quality gaps.

Corporate executives, therefore, regularly address the challenges of service gaps by finding out unexpressed customer needs, setting priorities and allocating resources. For a service provider to be competitive, it is imperative that he is aware of the basic service quality dimensions.

The service provider ought to address the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, communication material printed and the strategy of ensuring quality service delivery.

The growth and survival of a business depends on its ability to attract, retain and satisfy customers. The customer is interested on the reliability of the service provider. This should be viewed in terms of its ability to provide what is promised.

The customers' concern is on correctness of information given. The customer is keen on whether the service is right. The customer is also keen on whether the service is the same at all times and from all the provider's employees.

Service quality calls for courtesy and this can be manifested through politeness, respect and friendliness of staff. The staff should not only have a pleasant personality, but also must refrain from acting busy while serving customers. They should answer telephone calls and questions raised with courtesy and politeness.

Service quality calls for individualised attention. The service provider should show understanding of the customer's unique issues and ensure that they have access to responsible staff for clarification.

It is important to appreciate that the customer has needs. The service provider should aspire to address the human needs as they are the force behind the demand for services. Where a service provider is unable to fulfill customer needs, service gaps emerge.

The management is responsible for formulating and designing service delivery. Even after thorough review of service specification and desired service levels, service gaps still emerge. They can be attributed to role ambiguity, lack of perceived control and inappropriate supervisory control.

There are some organisations that promise customer services they are not able to provide. This results in a service quality gap. Communication with customers should be appropriate and with minimal noise. The language used to should be appropriate.

To minimise service gaps, staff and customer training is crucial. Training helps employees acquire appropriate skills. It is also important to train the customer on what to expect from the service provider.

— *The writer is an MBA graduate of Kenyatta University*

kuriamutura@yahoo.com