



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

March 26, 2015

Topic: March 26: “Building Competitive Advantage through Service Quality” featuring Dr. Ken Bernhardt, Marketing Consultant & Regents Professor Emeritus – GSU.



Dr. Ken Bernhardt came to speak at Women in Leadership on “How to Build a Competitive Advantage Through Service Quality.” Dr. Bernhardt is a renowned and honored retired Professor from Georgia State University and a 2014 winner of a Leadership Character Award in the Education category. We were thrilled to have Dr. Bernhardt come speak with us, and the group left the seminar with some new insights from our guest, the marketing guru!

Dr. Bernhardt began his presentation by pointing out a marketing truth – there is a big difference between what companies think they’re selling and what consumers are buying.

Consumers, in addition to buying a tangible product, will also spend more money on convenience, packaging, brand, ease of access, and how people feel about the company. In distinguishing the other parts of the product that create value to the consumer, it is important to recognize the level of service excellence that you deliver to your customers.

Dr. Bernhardt then asked the room to name 10 well-known companies that were known for their excellent product and customer service. Everyone in the room glanced around as they wracked their brains to create a full list of 10 organizations. During this struggle to name companies with great service, Dr. Bernhardt stated that he knew this would be a challenge. While many companies consider their service to be up to par, there is often a disconnect with what service is being provided and the expectations the customers have for this service. To illustrate the importance of closing these gaps, Dr. Bernhardt pointed out these known benefits to service quality (SQ):

- SQ is becoming a more competitive fact
- SQ translates into profits in most industries
- SQ is currently unmanaged in most industries
- There are only a few really excellent service companies
- Enormous competitive opportunities exist in most industries
- Becoming service oriented is much tougher than we thought
- We know ways that work and ways that don’t work

According to Dr. Bernhardt, the starting point for exceeding customers’ expectations is always understanding where the customers’ expectations come from. Customer expectations can come from

past experiences, word of mouth communication, personal needs, and what message the company is conveying to the consumer. Gaps in the fulfillment of these expectations arise from what companies assume are consumer expectations versus what the consumer actually expects of the service.

Dr. Bernhardt outlined for us the five dimensions of service quality:

- Reliability: ability to perform promised service dependably and accurately
- Assurance: knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
- Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communications materials
- Empathy: caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers
- Responsiveness: willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

With these outlined, Dr. Bernhardt and the group discussed what companies who have exceedingly good service quality do well. The first thing done well was having the basics down. Companies who have great service train their employees in the importance of customer service and give them the tools to provide good service to consumers. In addition to having the basics down, good companies know their customers. They look for moments when they can gather insights into their consumers, and they resolve to do whatever it takes to make their customers happy. Organizations with good service quality value good service inside the company as well as outside of the company, and they care about their employees as much as their customers. The final and important priority of companies with great service is that they are perpetually unsatisfied with their performance and always aim to be better.

To sum up his presentation, Dr. Bernhardt concluded with the most important components of service quality. Among this list were points that almost everyone in the workforce can relate to, such as “Quality is everyone’s job,” and “Quality is the little things, not just the big things.” However, there were three on the list that seemed to resonate most deeply:

- The foundation for service excellence is culture.
- Reliability and problem resolution make a powerful combination.
- Service quality is a journey, not a destination.

To see more about Dr. Ken Bernhardt, click [here](#).