



SOURCE:

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Important Reading: **Customer Service**

The Perks of a Truly Bold Brew

One company's formula for meeting "grande" expectations

One of my teaching assignments often takes me to Raleigh, North Carolina. While there, I always arrive early to treat myself to a coffee at a nearby Starbucks before class.

There is something about the clientele at this particular location that makes it difficult for me to blend in. I'm just not as cool as these fashionably attired young professionals, who exude sophistication with their laptops and Bluetooth devices. I think it's the opportunity to mingle with such apparently successful people that draws me to this Starbucks. Perhaps some of their style will rub off on me.

During my last visit, I placed my order, making every effort to put all those fancy adjectives in the correct order and prove that I belonged. After some friendly conversation with the person working the register, I noticed a smart-looking ceramic cup on a ledge slightly above eye level. "Nice design," I thought. "Pleasing graphics, the right size—it's all anyone would want in a company-branded mug."

I turned the cup over to read the price on the bottom—and, to my surprise, a seemingly endless stream of coins poured out. Feeling old and out of place, I stood there completely embarrassed, wishing I could disappear.

One of the things I like best about

Starbucks is the considerate, responsive, and empathetic staff. As soon as she realized what had happened, the barista began helping me gather the fallen coins and offered words of encouragement: "Oh gosh, someone must have thought this was a tip cup. I didn't even know there was anything in there."

Later, I pondered the difference between this and more common retail-customer experiences. How do some employers find great people, while others consistently fail to do so?

It cannot be all about the compensation; it has to be about hiring people with a customer-focused mindset and expecting, motivating, and training them to meet customer needs. The challenge is to find and recruit employees who instinctively want to help people. And then, they must be taught to make the customer feel comfortable and important—and maybe even intelligent for making the choice to shop at our particular store.

In class later that day, the students and I discussed successful supply chain strategy, noting that it's all about consistently and profitably achieving customer satisfaction. I started the discussion by asking, "Which is more important—profit or customer satisfaction?"

This led to a thoughtful debate, during which we concluded that the two are equal. If not for profit and satisfied customers, there would be no business.

But the lesson learned at Starbucks that day helped me take the discussion one step further. If not for the right people consistently executing consumer-driven supply chain strategy, it would be difficult to satisfy customers. It is the level of care that drives profitability and the satisfaction of the customers we serve.

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