

A summary of key issues emerging from my research on managing customer service

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1. Repurchase cycles are of real significance, but are rarely considered when locked into short termism. The longer the cycle of repurchase, the greater the danger of complacency, shown for instance by a lack of contact and a growing perception by the customer of lack of real after sales interest.
2. Organisations can be taken by surprise by false, or assumed loyalty - for instance by taking the view that no news (from customers) is good news.
3. A lot of businesses have too many of the wrong sort of customers - those they cannot profitably serve. Very few seem to have an accurate and specific profile of their most/least preferred customers.
4. Bonding levels are a powerful means of planning to get closer to customers, and measuring progress.
5. So very few organisations really listen to their customers, or seek meaningful feedback from them. Fewer still seem to value this feedback enough to provide the incentives it takes to gain the feedback that matters (and often hurts) the most, from those whose custom must be retained.
6. Many organisations seem to assume that *all* of their customers are crooked, or are out to get something for nothing - this alienates and irritates those who have issues that require sensitive management.
7. Customer loyalty is the key to long term success for any business, and is the most cost effective way of gaining a competitive advantage.
8. Few organisations seem to have any sort of recovery process for retaining customers intending to leave.
9. Little real customer satisfaction measurement seems to be happening, and that which is, tends not to be measuring the right things.
10. More and more organisations are writing customer care policies - but do they keep to them?
11. Some organisations are using customer orientation as a selection for redundancy criteria.
12. It is crucial to select with care those who are front line, customer facing people.
13. Truly empowered customer facing people will give the best customer service.
14. The lifetime customer value issue is rarely considered - again, in the short term, sales are often at the expense of the reaping of substantially greater future business.
15. Mission statements hardly ever mention the importance of customer service.
16. Many senior managements seem to equate customer care with short courses (for people other than themselves), and a reactive complaints procedure.
17. The five stage service-profit chain links profit and growth with employee policies: Profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty. Satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of services provided to customers. Value is created by satisfied, loyal, and productive employees. Employee satisfaction in turn, results primarily from high quality support services that enable employees to deliver results to customers.
18. The way people are managed is reflected in the customer care they deliver.

19. Customer service is a direct, and extremely cost effective means of market differentiation.
20. Flatter organisational structures should lead naturally to more customer-responsive organisations.
21. Measurable metrics can be used to assess customer service.
22. Customer service, customer focus and customer orientation are far deeper than customer care.
23. There is plenty of best practice research on customer service, but this seems to be largely unexplored.
24. Do we spend more time with the customers we like, and not enough with those who for instance have a grievance? Does this have implications? Can't we learn more from the less happy customers?
25. So many organisations make it difficult to do business with them. Few consciously make it easier. Those that make it difficult probably don't know how they obstruct customers, because they also, typically, make it very difficult to make views known.
26. Once a reputation for poor customer service has been cultivated it is very hard to shake this off.
27. Dialogue is a key issue for many customers - too many need to initiate contacts and take the lead when they feel their supplier should be more regularly in touch, and showing more concern.
28. Generally, customers have a low expectation of service levels. Thus surpassing expectations should not take much effort.
29. The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is not linear...this is worrying, and means that it takes more time cost and effort to enhance loyalty incrementally as it improves.
30. Influencers of purchases as well as end users are rich sources of feedback on customer service levels.
31. So called 'casual' or part-time people can have a very significant effect on customer service, yet their significance seems to be largely overlooked, they are typically the least well paid, and invested in of all employees.
32. Few organisations seem capable of effectively segmenting their customers - the more focused the better - in order to differentiate service delivery.
33. Customers are any organisation's best sales people, and most harmful 'terrorists'.
34. Few policy makers meet the customers who suffer or benefit from their decisions.
35. Customers buy solutions to their problems, not products or services. Few businesses seem to genuinely recognise this, and develop real empathy.
36. There are not many complaint handling processes out there. Too many organisations have a very long way to go before they genuinely see a complaint as a gift.
37. To manage customer service well, and improve quality generally we must 'drive out fear', and encourage all employees for instance to come up with, and reward, new ideas and feedback on service performance.
38. Retained customers spend more as their relationship with a supplier develops.
39. There are no customers - only 'partners' and 'transients'. A remarkable number of businesses seem satisfied to complacently work with transients (you gain some you lose some), and make no effort to build a relationship with customers beyond a single purchase. This is all the more astounding for those who sell high volume, relatively short repurchase cycle goods and services - e.g. cars and holidays.
40. If more effort was put into customer retention, less would need to be spent on expensive marketing.

41. Customer service would be transformed if the most senior management was for instance paid bonus on the basis of the value of retained business/reducing the value of lost business.
42. Customers are becoming far more fickle, litigious, and willing to pass on their experiences, particularly bad ones.
43. Customer's expectations of high service is increasing - from a very low base.
44. Organisations whose customers buy high value items on a regular basis, where customer loyalty is not strong, and competition is fierce should be most concerned about customer service.
45. Real customer service can cost money in at least the short term.
46. No business should be taken by surprise by the defection of a valued customer...few get sufficiently close to even see the signals.
47. Two key factors in providing real customer service are authority and genuine care and concern. Unless both are held and shown customer service may well suffer. Many who care don't have the authority to deliver, and too many in a position to deliver don't seem to care enough to do so.
48. The real test of customer service for most organisation are when things go wrong. Few seem to have prepared meaningful recovery strategies, or genuinely empowered their front-line people to deal with key incidents.
49. Customers like to be treated as individuals, not as 'segments', or in a general, impersonal manner.
50. It is very advisable to involve people in setting their own customer service standards than impose these upon them.
51. Quality not quantity of market share really matters to any organisation, 'though few seem to consider this. Most businesses have customers they should let go - for a variety of reasons.
52. Supplier or customer visits are too often confined to most senior management, who are often remote figures, whose lack of credibility and knowledge of products, personnel and services can actually harm relationships!
53. Not many organisations seem to measure how soon a customer becomes profitable in terms of marketing spend balanced against revenue generation.
54. Although the initial customer care of many organisations is truly outstanding, once past the superficial exterior, no real customer orientation is in evidence. For instance many retailers are under-staffed - costing sales, and so many organisations have telephone systems apparently designed to make contact with real people directly impossible.
55. It helps to focus on 'moments of truth' those key incidents, or points in a process that are really critical to providing what the customer perceives as top quality service.
56. Customers are rarely involved directly in efforts to improve service for them.
57. Most senior management, those in a position to actually improve customer service, are too often too remote from customers, and are 'protected' from genuine feedback and grievances by layers of management and supervision, who thus insulate them from the true picture.
58. It is difficult to retain the degree of objectivity required to see things from the customer's perspective.
59. Differentiation of service level or reward is an important issue - for instance for new/existing customers. It is easy to annoy loyal customers by for instance excluding them from special offers aimed at attracting new business.

60. Do enough organisations consider the customer's costs of doing business with them? This may be very low, or it could be high, for instance involving taking time off work, travel and perhaps meals or in some cases accommodation.
61. Many businesses could keep an 'at risk' register of customers felt to be possible/likely to lapse, and implement specific plans to retain them?
62. Dis/continuity of personal contact can be a sensitive issue for many types of business, whose customers want to maintain contact and develop a positive relationship with an individual person.
63. Internal competition, and unhelpful pursuance of different functional goals can directly harm customer service. It is clear that many businesses are not structured or managed in a way that co-ordinates and focuses customer service efforts.
64. Not many businesses seem to have a specific, senior person who is personally responsible for the management of customer service. The absence of personal responsibility can lead to problems of collective accountability.
65. Many senior managers seem incapable of accepting the need to improve customer service, and, where appropriate, take responsibility for any issues that ought to have been addressed in the past. Unless the need to work positively on customer service is felt and owned at the top, many more currently apparently successful businesses will die. Success breeds complacency and failure.
66. What strikes me from both my own personal experiences, and the research I have undertaken, is that what the customer perceives as poor customer service is the most powerful indicator of organisational ill-health that could be sought. Thus patterns emerge - the phone that isn't answered, or the endless queue, the disinterested staff, or the tatty, tardy paperwork - may together indicate that whatever the current, typically financial measures of well-being, those organisations are in *big* trouble.
67. Although customers develop very strong views about the customer service they receive (or do not!), these are rarely made known to their suppliers, who often live in ignorance of these to the point that they are convinced all is felt to be well. No news is too often, incorrectly seen as good news.
68. Unless proactive efforts are made to find out what customers actually think about the service they receive very only the trickle of unrepresentative issues will reach those able to determine service quality.
69. One way to surprise and delight customers is to let them share in good fortune...such as voluntarily reducing costs due to a lessening in costs, say of accommodation, or from associated subcontractors.
70. Customers are often invited to give feedback on service quality, but few seem to. Customers will it seems do so only when they feel their views will be taken seriously, and ironically, this means that those suppliers that most need their opinions tend not to get them. Why should customers become quality inspectors? In ignorance of the experience of 'never again' customers things just get worse.
71. Too many organisations are perceived by customers as having unhelpfully inflexible systems and systems. Too often the customer has to fit what the organisation wants, not the other way around.
72. The really brave questions that too few organisations in genuine competition ask is 'would you do business with us again?' and/or 'would you recommend us to others?'. I wonder why this is not done?
73. Contact and genuine concern shown *after* sales differentiates powerfully. So many customers find that any care shown evaporates once a sale has been made.
74. It seems to me that 'good' or even 'exceptional' customer service tends to go unnoticed, and therefore unrecognised, perhaps due to being what was expected or anticipated, whereas service that disappoints is very obvious and can have a lasting impact.

75. As a general rule, those organisations most in need of help with customer service are those who resist most strongly any efforts to consider the issue. If this is true, then inevitably the better service providers will grow stronger at the expense (to the point of extinction) of those without the courage or interest to do whatever it takes to please their customers.
76. Customers expect a consistently excellent standard of service irrespective of the time of day, day of the week or month, or time of the year. A lot of organisations fall down badly on this.
77. Physical premises and facilities matter a lot. Customer's perceptions of the organisation as a whole, and certainly the quality of service provide can be significantly influenced by these 'tangibles'.
78. Customers expect the full attention of whoever is handling their issue/s. This doesn't always happen.
79. Customers are best served by those who can genuinely empathise. Many in front-line positions cannot do this as they have no first hand knowledge of the product or service. For instance, many estate agents *appear* to be too young to have ever bought a house of their own.
80. Complaining is one of the few opportunities some people have of feeling important and empowered. Thus, for instance, 'taking on' a large, significant, high profile organisation gives a buzz to a lot of people who don't have much else about which to feel pleased with themselves.
81. Organisations that conduct their own feedback exercises and surveys may not get as much, as real, or as representative a picture as those who sub contract to a third party.
82. Systems and procedures must be set up so as to directly support efforts to enhance customer service. It is clear that many organisations do not for instance manage the information held on their customers at all well in terms of assisting efforts to maintain contact, or elicit feedback.
83. The perception of many organisations' customer service is significantly determined to very often a large number of third parties who can directly and powerfully influence the way customers feel about the product or service purchased.
84. It seems there are three principal types of customers: those an organisation has and wants to keep; those it has not got, but wants, and those it had and wants to get back.
85. One major survey has shown that each customer that complains 'represents' 27 others who, for whatever reason choose not to do so. This means that every 100 complaints received should really be read as 2700! I wonder what the ratio is for real, for specific businesses?
86. Customers prefer to pass on 'bad news' experiences than 'good'. This is very harmful to businesses, particularly when so few customers make their grievances known.
87. Customers are capable of going to extraordinary lengths, and of doing some bizarre things to bring other's attention to their grievances, and to do harm to organisations that have made them angry.
88. To the customer, perception is reality. This is rarely understood, especially by those who seek apparent logic where there appears to be none.
89. Many organisations make it difficult for the customer to complain, for instance requiring complaints to be made in writing.
90. Once a customer is annoyed, sensitivity to other, previously minor irritants increases, and compounds the worsening situation. For instance when the phone is not answered when trying to make a complaint, or being told 'the Managing Director doesn't take calls' when that person is sought, and that 'the customer relations team is there to deal with customer's issues'.
91. Despite the best efforts of competent and genuine staff, customer service is a direct function of the resources (principally people) that is invested. Poor service often results from inadequate resourcing.

92. A true picture of customer service, and what needs to improve can be gained via consultation with those in associated roles who have a clear perspective on the service provider. For instance, if a mortgage provider wanted to know how it needed to improve its service, it should listen to the views of estate agents, insurance companies, surveyors and solicitors.
93. It's too easy to dismiss the extreme examples of customer dissatisfaction as unrepresentative and maybe even insane...but, although they may well take things a little far, a great many other customers can typically relate to the cause of their frustration if not their means of protest. So dismiss consideration of these people at your peril. If we use *them* as our benchmark of customer satisfaction then we will be exceeding the wants and needs of nearly all the others!
94. Very often, complaining customers, who may well have gone to considerable trouble to get access to whoever they want to speak with, get told in effect "well all of our competitors do this" (we're no worse than anyone else), or, "we've never had a complaint about this before" - which to me means "you must be some sort of unrepresentative lunatic, stop wasting my time".
95. It seems clear to me that the absence or excellence of customer service very often fits a pattern. The best organisations in terms of customer service tend to for instance reward, resource, and motivate better than those who take ages to answer the phone, have demotivated employees and clearly have no real regard for customers at all.
96. It's surprising just how alert customers that are annoyed or upset are to other, apparently minor customer service imperfections, that I am sure would otherwise have not been noticed.
97. A re-inforcer of poor customer performance is the often widely held perception of those in a position to advise or make known the issues and incidents most in need of attention of "what's the point, they won't listen anyway...in any case, why should I put myself out to help them?". It is, ironically, the more customer-focused organisations that will reap the benefits of the information needed to improve still further and move farther ahead of the less competent.
98. It's very clear to me that customers who stand up for themselves, and for instance make efforts to contact the decision makers beyond first-line people get a far better deal, and have their issues resolved more satisfactorily than those in the huge majority who merely rant, rave, mutter and moan.
99. A natural unwillingness to reflect upon customer service failure often results in an unhealthy assumption of false customer loyalty. There is more to be learned from a thorough analysis of root cause reasons for customer defections than from the customer service successes of other organisations and industries.
100. Customer satisfaction surveys are often misleading. Perhaps *dissatisfaction* surveys would be more useful! Too many surveys fail to distinguish between customer types and segments, and it is odd that so many suggest 80-90% of returns show apparently high satisfaction, yet for the goods or services surveyed, customer retention and repurchase rates are consistently below 50%. The only true test of customer satisfaction are retention rates.
101. The best way to start a genuine effort at improving customer service is to find out from customers, both past and present what has caused them to stay or leave; do a thorough root cause analysis; measure the cost of defections; target and profile specific customer types that are profitable, then pursue a planned strategy to retain/attract as many of these as is possible.
102. There seems to be a general unwillingness to even consider ways to improve customer service, even amongst organisations that claim to be customer-driven! There are many possible reasons for this.
103. Too many organisations sub-contract customer service intelligence gathering inappropriately to external consultants. Senior management often show no appetite for direct involvement in this, and as a consequence, do not learn the powerful lessons, nor benefit from the knowledge concentrated in those externally contracted people.
104. In contrast to many favoured, especially financial corporate performance indicators, customer retention rate analysis is truly predictive of future performance. Yet how much consideration does this get?

105. Real customer service is all about taking ownership of the customers' problems. This is asking far too much of most organisations, whose customer facing people very rarely if ever realise this.
106. The policies and practices of different parts of the same organisation may impact positively, neutrally or negatively on shared customers. Thus what suits one part of the organisation may for instance have a very harmful effect on another, as a 'shared' customers' satisfaction varies in response to events.
107. I detect an unwillingness to survey after sales customer satisfaction at transaction level. This can be a fatal oversight, as relatively positive point of sales satisfaction data can lead to assumed sustained satisfaction that has in fact, dramatically lessened with subsequent post-purchase contacts.
108. However apparently definite statistics and measures of customer satisfaction are, they really only tell us where to target our efforts at retaining those customers on whom future prosperity depends.
109. When concessions are granted to customers, these are too often made with very poor grace. For instance, the local garage that seemed to think I should be grateful to get any sort of courtesy car, even one of considerably lower specification, and without a radio 'because so many get stolen'! Then when I make progress with a re-negotiated invoice for work needed on a car bought three months previously, I get fierce faces and sulking.
110. There is a considerable knock-on effect in terms of customer satisfaction along the customers' total experience - so, if a house move has been massively traumatic, and costly, furniture and carpet sales will suffer for instance. Equally, positive experiences along the chain will have potentially better effects for all in contact with the happy client. Perhaps more supplier collaboration is a good idea?
111. I am struck by the number of times an organisation seeks to counter emotional, irrational customer feedback with 'the rules', or the defence of rigid policies, with absolutely no recognition of the effort the customer is making to give valuable feedback...'listen to me will you, I am telling you why I am leaving you, and giving you a clue why so many others have'.
112. Organisations, irrespective of the nature of their activity, that are entrepreneurial, and genuinely eager to please their customers look, feel and are different to the rest, whose written policies and grand statements about customer care don't stand up to close examination.
113. For the importance of customer service to hit home with the force required throughout an organisation, and in particular large ones, a lot of resources, people and money for instance must be dedicated to internal communications, and not just staff circulars.
114. Organisations that are united against external forces, and that do not engage in harmful internal skirmishes or even full blown wars are able to meet and exceed customer needs most effectively.
115. My jaundiced view of the vast majority of 'customer relations or customer service' departments is that they are essentially little if anything more than complaint processing units.
116. It is often more cost effective in the short and medium term, for an organisation to provide a poor quality of service and suffer the fallout from this, than to do what it takes to sort customer problems at source.
117. Very often the warning signs of an impending customer defection are clear to those who are looking for them. For instance, less use of a previously bust credit card account may well suggest the use of competitor's services, and that future business may be about to cease.
118. Those that have studied customer loyalty in detail have found a clear correlation between customer retention and customer-facing employee turnover. They note that this is a self-perpetuating factor, as successful and appreciated employees will want to stay with organisations where they achieve long term results that help them meet their unsatisfied needs.
119. Sales, marketing and management practices can all drive profitable long term customers away! Paying commission to sales people for the first sale, without consideration of subsequent retention or repurchases - the *quality* of the sale; sweeping large numbers of price sensitive customers into the organisation at great expense for a short time; skimping on the thoroughness of recruitment, and moving key customer facing people around before they get a chance to exploit their relationships and customer knowledge are common practices that work against a loyalty-based system.

120. Too many organisations seem to have information management systems and databases incapable of the sort of analysis really sophisticated customer service requires. Or if they have them, these are rarely used to their full capacity to minimise harmful defections or specifically target marketing efforts.
121. The easiest to acquire customers are for many businesses the least profitable; most demanding, and least loyal. Few businesses seem to understand that quality of customer is more profitable in the short, medium and the long term than simply for instance discounting prices to buy quantity at any price.
122. There seems, alas to be no natural short, or even medium term correlation between genuine customer concern and financial well being, indeed short term financial measures may have an inverse relationship with customer satisfaction as staff are cut, and prices rise, lessening value and prompting imminent defections. Thus the complacency of so many businesses, and lack of will to get serious about customers' needs and niggles.
123. Customer defections rarely result from one specific and high impact incident or experience. More often, it is the steady accumulation of a series of irritations that cause them to seek greater value elsewhere.
124. Sadly, even when an organisation's senior and line management are really serious about customer service, just one bad experience can for that customer, and all that get told subsequently, mean a very different picture is created.
125. I am repeatedly struck by the complacency that results from *assumed* loyalty. So many organisations over-estimate the true loyalty of their customers via for instance 'hostage-taking' three year finance deals that penalise the customer for seeking another supplier, and boost apparent satisfaction and loyalty rates. The true test here is repurchase rates...do such customers when free of the ties *choose* to place repeat business with that organisation?
126. Where customer service standards exist, these in my perception - that is as a customer - are used not as *minimum* standards, but, in many instances, as *the* standard. For instance, Crystal Holidays have an externally set (ABTA) standard of responding to correspondence within 28 days...when I ring after 23 days I get told I will get a letter next week! Thus it seems to me that such standards can, ironically, lessen the service customers might have received without them.
127. Customers are far more likely to make known their displeasure than pass on positive feedback. Stated simply, it is far easier to annoy a customer than it is to please one.
128. When front-line staff really believe in the value of their products and services they show this clearly in the quality of concern shown to the customer.
129. A critical challenge for any organisation seeking to balance maximising profit whilst retaining only those customers that are indeed profitable, is to understand what John Cheese calls their zones of pricing flexibility and of value destruction. Thus as Cheese says, the profitable should be appeased, and the unprofitable deterred. It is clear to me that most (?) organisations don't have the information systems that allow accurate identification of customer lifetime profitability, and, in consequence, find sensitive, differentiated relationship management at least difficult, and more often impossible.
130. When, as today Barclaycard announces 1100 redundancies and says it is due to 'increased competition in the marketplace' it means to me that it may at least in part be due to poor customer retention, recovery and retrieval.
131. Our new washer/dryer machine has just been delivered. It has struck me that many customers have considerably more contact with employees and organisational representatives and agents than for instance in-store employees. I wonder if the significance of these people is recognised by those who are in a position to ensure such people - engaged in delivery and installation for instance - are up to speed on customer skills and issues.
132. Prompted by my most recent reading on customer service, I really don't believe that customer *needs* thought about or considered by those who should. Sure, customer *wants* get some attention, but what about the *needs* that drive these wants and behaviour?

133. The degree of cross-brand damage that a bad experience can inflict across an organisation's portfolio of products and services can be very considerable, and seems to be an issue that few have pondered. For instance, I wonder if my many awful experiences with Virgin Trains has caused to consciously or otherwise to buy less totally different Virgin branded stuff. Of course, positive experiences can have the reverse, and very cost-effective result.
134. I like the idea of 'added emotional value' that only the most customer-oriented and motivated employees give during any transaction, again highlighting the need to put great care into recruiting the right people.
135. Ironically and problematically, the self-same thing that pleases, or even delights some customers, can significantly irritate and drive away others. An example of this is voice mail, and automated, multiple option customer 'services' - such as with my bookclub.
136. Sometimes service recovery can be instantaneous and impressive - when I rang this morning to resolve a Royal Bank of Scotland Mastercard payments difficulty, and made it known I had to ring 12 times to get beyond an engaged tone, I was told "Sorry we are incredibly busy" which I expected, then "Can I call you back?" which I did not. Such experiences do impress me, and show comfortable empowerment, meaning in this case that the fella knew it was okay to offer to call back, incurring that cost, without the world coming tumbling down around him...and he really did seem to care about the problem I had!
137. It is clear to me that most (?) organisations seek to fit customers into systems rather than adapt their systems and working practices to meet the needs, hopes and expectations of those customers.
138. I have been struck recently by the insensitivity of so much correspondence to customers, especially where the news is not particularly welcome and/or some explanation of an issue is needed, but rarely given - at least not in a way that properly clarifies issues for the customer.
139. Some organisations have a definite policy of not under any circumstances accepting fault - for instance by apologising - as this incurs the wrath of insurers who pick up the bill for compensation claims.
140. How often are customer service competences considered, sought, and thoroughly explored in relation to new recruits? It seems to me that very little effort is made by most organisations to find the precious gems that are the very best customer-centred people.
141. No matter how trivial they may seem, there is no such thing as a *minor* issue around customer service.
142. Having had a terrible time this whole morning with my Bosch washer/tumble dryer, and in spite of very impressive, lengthy after care support to try and help me correct the problem, I am intrigued by the design problems that are the root of a lot of customer irritations. After all, if the machine was easier to self-service, meaning clean the filters, and didn't require pulling out, turning off taps, and using pliers to access them, we'd be more likely to pass on positive comments, and repurchase. As it is, the chances of repurchase are nil, and we will no doubt deter other would-be purchasers. This is not the fault of the manufacturing, sales, despatch, marketing, or service elements of the customer experience, but the root cause of the issue is at square one - design. As a result of the product design customer satisfaction is just not possible. Is there is a feedback loop between the service engineers who get first hand the customers' irritations - five days without a washer/dryer, and the rest of the total organisation.
143. In the clamour to re-invent, re-engineer and totally revolutionist organisationally, I think we too often neglect to retain and develop further existing strengths in customer service.
144. A genuine and honoured guarantee is worth a lot to a customer and will gain business.
145. I really like David Freemantles' idea of 'emotional connectivity' - that there is an in/appropriate way to genuinely empathise with customers' at a feelings level. This stresses the value of seeking this during employee recruitment, and of so far as we are able to, helping front-line in particular to learn this.
146. Smoothness of service, and seamless operation may well impress a customer rather less than *seeing* an effort made. For instance, when everything is running like clockwork, a customer is unlikely to be impressed, even, or especially, when they have cause to be, however, if even a minor issue requires an effort to be made to meet that customers' needs, then the customers' knowledge or observation of that effort will often have a positive effect.

147. It's no surprise to me that people who spend less want more from their investment, because even a little means more to them than higher value purchases from people who have a lot more to spend. Too few organisations seem to realise this, and appear exasperated at the demands of those who in their eyes are spending insignificant amounts.
148. I had an appalling experience at Rome airport with a British Airways flight that was delayed seven and a half hours, and was conned with empty promises of alternative flights in lieu of hotel accommodation. In addition, all B A staff went off shift at 8 pm - and we finally left at 2.45. At no time were we told anything about what was going on. Anyway, I established my complaint needed to be lodged with Maersk Air - as they were the operator of the flight. Two relevant issues on this - firstly when I spoke to B A to clarify if I complain to them or Maersk there was zilch interest in my issue, just an eagerness to point me in the direction of Maersk, and, significantly, I am absolutely certain that every passenger knew nothing of the Maersk connection, and felt themselves to have been messed about by B A. Lots of issues here for the management of third parties in service delivery.
149. It is always surprising to me that in the absence of one apparently critical person things important to customers cannot be done.
150. A follow-up to the Maersk issue above (148) - within two weeks I had an excellent example of truly professional service recovery, and a more than satisfactory offer of compensation. A learning point for me was that the other 35 passengers are in all likelihood still muttering away and doing harm to British Airways (not Maersk UK), yet will get nothing from the organisation because they couldn't be bothered to make known their grievance. I now speak very positively of Val Batsford, Customer Services Manager, and her organisation.
151. I am starting to notice how often commercial workplaces - offices and retail outlets - have one or more employee puffing away on a cigarette outside and in full view of customers and passers by. This does not impress me.
152. It worries me that so many very senior managers are so apparently detached from contact with money paying customers, and that their perceptions and opinions reflect this. Another related issue is that such senior people tend to keep each others' company - does this reinforce their distance from the true picture and experiences of the front line people paid a small fraction of their salaries?
153. I heard on the radio yesterday something that made me think, the fella was making the distinction between service and servility. This is a fundamental point, as I believe that too many people in customer service roles feel for whatever reason, inferior, and this shows!
154. Our recent experience of buying a new house from Crest Homes is that really excellent, genuine front-line customer service can compensate for a lack of organisational customer-focus. So we have not been as angry as we have had cause to have been with a lot things as a result of the real concern shown by Maureen their customer-facing person.
155. Kellogg's have really made a mess of customer service recovery in terms of how they have totally failed to accept that there really was a live beetle in the packet of Frosties we opened for our six year old. Maybe there is a direct causal correlation between genuine customer service and competition. Thus those with most perceived competitors are more likely to be customer-focused, whereas those complacent organisations who have or feel themselves to have few or no real competitors have no real customer-orientation, as I conclude is true of Kellogg's. Honestly, there was a beetle in the Frosties packet, even though John Mandy their U K Customer Services Manager (sic) tells me there couldn't possibly have been.
156. The only test of real customer service is post-purchase. No matter what profound and/or seductive words are said or written up to and at the point of sale, service is largely judged following the sale.
157. Recent problems with Marks and Spencer has once again highlighted how difficult it is to get to the people at the top of organisations. I was trying to speak to Susan Yate at the Warrington call centre to make known my problems concerning putting a bed back together following a house move and, regarding getting directly in touch, but she was too well protected - I just could not get past those blocking my way. This lead me to seriously ponder the validity of protecting key people. Is it okay to refuse a customer access to senior people? I need to think about this, and my immediate reaction is no it is not.

158. Customers, it seems to me, very often form indelible, and harmful impressions about organisations and their (lack of?) customer service on the basis of incomplete information.
159. The more times I am bothered to complain, and make known my bad experiences with organisations, the more I resent the need to navigate their structures and 'rules', in order to get to the people with whom I really want to speak. The persistence this requires means I am often seen as an unusual, and therefore in their view unrepresentative ranting maniac.
160. A plastic foot for a chair Leg has broken from the set bought from Ikea a couple of months ago. This involved a long call to a national call centre whose representative will then get a message on my behalf to the store in Bristol I wanted to call direct. Ring the Bristol coded number and you get somebody who didn't know how to spell Wiltshire - or where it is! The issue for me is that when working with call centres, I am entrusting others, within the organisation, or third parties if contracted to them to represent my concerns...very often I would rather have the option as with Marks and Spencer, to do this myself.
161. More and more I encounter front-line people who give me the organisation line or policy on a matter that irritates me - not allowing me a direct phone number of a colleague is a recurrent example - and when pushed for a rationale they don't have one. These people need more support, as they do doubt feel exposed and ridiculous, and shouldn't be such a target for often unreasonable customer behaviour.
162. It's a perennial, but well worth reinforcing, there is not a day goes by without my reflecting that most organisations would benefit much more from knowing what customers don't like, and that are likely to deter them from doing future business with them than that they seem to want most...the good news. Thus there is far more value in 'difficult learning' for those organisations grown up enough to really welcome and use this.