

Evaluation of Customer Care Service in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

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Abstract.

Purpose – To Evaluate the Knowledge and Practice of Customer care Service in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library UNN.

Methodology – A descriptive survey research which used a structured questionnaire to elicit information from the respondents.

Findings – The staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe library are user friendly. Opening and closing hours of the library is dependent on user demand. However there is no quality improvement team in the library and no signage to direct users to their destination. Measurement of good practice in the library is not based on job performance and most of the non-academic staffs are not aware of the role of the university library in the educational and research challenges of the university.

Practical Implication – In an age where the world has turned to a global village, through information and communication gadget, Libraries stand the danger of fizzling out of existence unless its human relations capacity is strengthened. It was recommended that training on customer care service should be given to all staff; the library should institute a quality improvement team.

Originality/Value – A fundamental study that challenges libraries to stand out in a competitive digital environment. The work will be of value to anybody working in a service based organization.

Keyword – Customer care, customer service, Library, service organizations.

Paper type – Research paper.

Introduction

Customer care service is quite difficult to define because what customers expect are different in different situations. For example, if you go to a library to make references inquiries, you will probably want your customer service to be quick and accurate. A friendly assistant might be a bonus but your main concern, and the main thing that will attract you to make a return visit is likely to be getting what you asked for, served and given to you quickly. On the other hand, if you visit a restaurant for a romantic candlelit dinner, a slow service giving you time between each course may be appreciated. In such a situation, the emphasis may be on ambience rather than efficiency.

From the foregoing one can adduce that what make up customer service is the nature of the organization, type of service they render and the customer's expectation. A library might have the material the client is in need of, and yet fall below the clients' expectations. The problem might be in the material not well package, clumsy or abusive staff or dirty environment.

Lyons (1970) defines customer care service as "all the direct and in direct contact between an organization and its clients". In any organization, some people are engaged in direct and regular customers contact e.g. the library guards, Library assistants, and librarian's secretary. They are described as frontline staff. Other people may occasionally have contact with the client e.g. library attendants, cleaners and gardeners, these people are called back room staff. They have indirect contact with customers or occasionally direct contact. Others may be support staff and although they may very rarely come into contact with customers their role in customer service is still vital in giving the frontline and backroom staff the support they need in providing customers with a good service. It is pertinent to note that in all organizations, all staffs are engage in customer service or care. If a book is wrongly catalogued, the cataloguer has done a poor customer service. If the acquisition librarian acquire materials based on her own interest to the detriment of the users, the acquisition librarian has done a poor customer service and if a book that appeared in the library catalogue cannot be traced in

the library collection, the circulation librarian has done a bad customer service because he has advertised a book that is not in the library.

Customer service is all about ensuring that the customer is completely satisfied. Satisfied customers will in turn lead to well motivated staff. Staffs that treat customers with care and respect will be appreciated by the customer. Customer care according to the researcher simply means “looking after customers”. Anyone who fails to look after customers with the view that it is not his job lets down other colleagues. To care for customers means to care for their individual needs and requirements. Lyons (1997) went further to say that “real customer service goes further than merely satisfying customers. It is concerned with exceeding their expectations. Expectations are not the same as needs. They can be based on advertisement, reputation, previous experience or the recommendation of others. If a customer is made to understand that he can be attended to, once he enters the library base on advertisement or past reputation whereas he/she has to wait for at least ten minutes, the library has clearly failed to meet customers’ expectations. The problem with recommendation is that the taste of the customer may be quite different from that of the person making the recommendation. In that case, one might be unable to meet the customers’ expectations and it may be beyond ones ability to do so. Service is only service if it is caring, prompt and effective as well as efficient and economical. Collier (1994) defined customer service as providing the right products to the right customer at the right time. Ranganathan, the famous Indian Librarian said it all in his five laws of library science.

1. Books are for use
2. Every reader his book
3. Every book its reader
4. Save the time of the reader
5. The library is a growing organism

Customer service is a distinguisher and a value adder, as such should not be toyed with.

Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, university of Nigeria, Nsukka is an academic library. An academic library is the library associated with a degree granting institution of higher education. Academic libraries are identified by the post

Secondary Institutions of which they are a part and provide all of the following services.

1. An organized collection of printed or other materials or a combination thereof.
2. A staff trained to provide and interpret such materials as required to meet the informational, cultural, recreational or educational needs of clientele.
3. An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to clientele.
4. The physical facilities necessary to support such a collection.

The academic library is the heart of the academic and institution it serves, in this case University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It is the academic health and intellectual vitality of the parent organization. The effectiveness of an academic institution depends largely upon the state of health and excellence of its library, which is its lifeblood (Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002). The function of the academic library is greatly interwoven to the functions of the institution which it serves. The functions of academic institutions are:

1. To conserve the existing knowledge
2. to transmit knowledge through teaching
3. To create new knowledge through research.

The academic library is the main agent through which academic institutions accomplished the above functions. The academic library conserves, makes these knowledge available for teaching and for students independent learning. It serves as the basis for all teaching and research. Without it, it is impossible to add to the sum of human knowledge bearing in mind that research is cumulative and builds upon what is already known.

Most clients of academic libraries are students, researchers and academic. These clients visit the library with the hope to obtain a fulfillment of their dreams/ambition. Students who join the university do so to obtain a degree both in character and learning. The library as an educational and research arm of the University, must be able to assist students realize these dream. The chairmen of Revlon Company once gathered his sales force together and ask them what business they were in. They all replied without too much thought, “the business of selling cosmetics, no said the chairman soberly “you are in the business of selling dreams” the

business of making people beautiful” (Baldock 1995) Like wise the library is in not just into the business of making book and noon book materials available for research and learning but into the business of helping young people and researchers attain their academic and research goals.

Who is a Library Client.

A library client is any body in need of services rendered by a library. He might seek library services through direct contact with the library by visiting the library or by indirect contact through telephones or mail. In the case of academic libraries, the library clients are mostly students, researchers, academic and external users from the library’s immediate environment. These clients need recognition. They need to feel wanted. They must be recognized as the reason the library organization exists. They are the primary influence on any strategy to be adopted by the library. The client is not an interruption to the work; they are the purpose for it. They are doing staff a favor by giving them the opportunity to serve them (Gandhi, 1997). Holden (1999) asserts that the “customer is king”. The customer is not someone with whom to argue or match wits. No one has ever won an argument with a client. Customers visit organization because they need certain goods and services. It is the duty or the organization to provide the goods and services in a way that is profitable to the customer first and then the organization. Customers are hard to come by and once lost they seldom come back (Handy, 1990). The most serious aspect of it might be that the defected client might be an important person in the university administration who might be in a position to influence things for good toward the library or somebody that might be in a position to give or help attract donations/grants to the library. Wassel (1989) outlined the causes of customers dissatisfaction as follows: dubious staff that would want clients to pay for services that are otherwise free, poor instruction on how to use materials especially reference materials, being kept waiting, poor communication between the client and the library staff, poor informed service person and impolite staff who brush clients aside. Collier (1994) proposed the three P’s for competing in the global market place for service organizations like the library. They include:

1. Physical evidence: Interior/exterior facility layout, décor, lights, signage, service

counters, cleanliness etc. Employees appearance and hygiene Equipment/automation convenience, reliability, ease of use and attractiveness. Exterior capacity adequate, such as parking lots, loading ramps etc.

2. Facility, Process and Job design. Detailed operating procedures, manual and job descriptions. Procedure for customer problem resolution. Training on the technical/procedure part of the job. Establish standards of performance for facility, process and equipment.
3. Participants: Training on human interaction skills and customer problem resolution, employment reward systems and procedures, personal selling, self-service/group participation procedures and norms of behavior, simultaneous execution of technical and human interaction skills at points of customer contact.

Each of the three P’s is an opportunity to build quality, gain competitive advantage, and define business strategy.

Objectives of the Study.

To find out what staff of Nnmadi Azikiwe Library knew and practice about customer care service.

To find out ways of improving customer care services in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library.

Research questions.

What does staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library know about customer care service?

What are the ways of improving customer care services in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library?

Statement of the Problem

A crucial factor for the success of every organization is understanding the customer. Success today stands or falls due to an organizations relationship with its customers (Baldark, 1995). The library, in the face of serious competition from the internet, virtual library etc need to strengthen its human relations capacity otherwise it will lose its market share to other organizations that place high value on their clients.

Research Methodology

This is a survey research. An eleven item structured questionnaire titled customer service

in library organizations was used to elicit information from the respondents. The questionnaire was based on the Wassel (1999) outline of causes of customer dissatisfaction and Colliers (1994) three P's for competing in the global market place.

The respondents were made up of all staff of the Nnamdi Azikiwe library Nsukka. There are one hundred and eleven staff at Nnamdi Azikiwe library, made up of thirty-five academic staff and seventy-six non academic staff. Among the academic staff, three have doctorate degree in

library services, 20 have masters degree in library services and the rest are assistant librarians with bachelor degrees in library services or related field. Among the non academic staff, 8 have diplomas in library services, 58 have West African School Certificate and 10 have first School Leaving Certificate.

The same questionnaire was used to elicit information from the two groups. The result was analyzed separately using simple percentages and compared with each other.

The questionnaire: Customer relations in service/Library organizations.

Table 1. Academic Staff Questionnaire

	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Staff are smart, ever smiling neatly dressed and willing to attend to library clients	28 (85%)	4 (12%)	-	1 (3%)
There is a suggestion/complaint box in which users drop their feelings in writing	-	-	33 (100%)	-
The library has a quality improvement team that constantly analyses situation in the library and make recommendation for improvement	-	3 (9%)	29 (89%)	1 (3%)
There are notices in strategic positions in the library directing users to where they will get required services	1 (1%)	5 (15%)	25 (76%)	2 (6%)
Opening and closing hours are governed by user demand	21 (64%)	8 (24%)	1 (3%)	3 (9%)
The environment around the library is conducive to learning-clean, no noise good toilet facilities etc.	8 (24%)	2 (6%)	5 (15%)	18 (56%)
Clients are attended based on their position in the society/university	16 (48%)	10 (33%)	4 (12%)	3 (9%)
Difficult and abusive staff are made to take back what they give	6 (18%)	3 (9%)	15 (45%)	10 (30%)
Measurement of best practice in the library depend on being able to deliver and on time	9 (27%)	2 (6%)	16 (48%)	6 (18%)
Staff are fully aware of the role of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library in meeting the educational challenges of the university	28 (85%)	5 (15%)	-	-
Staff are aware that a defected customer is a customer and business lost.	10 (33%)	2 (6%)	13 (39%)	8 (24%)

Table 2: Non Academic staff Questionnaire.

Non-academic staff	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Staff are smart, ever smiling neatly dressed and willing to attend to library clients	68 (89%)	8 (11%)	-	-
There is a suggestion/complaint box in which users drop their feelings in writing	-	-	70 (92%)	6 (8%)
The library has a quality improvement team that constantly analyses situation in the library and make recommendation for improvement	-	10 (13%)	50 (66%)	16 (21%)
There are notices in strategic positions in the library directing users to where they will get required services	-	-	66 (87%)	10 (13%)
Opening and closing hours are governed by user demand	63 (83%)	7 (9%)	1 (1%)	5 (7%)
The environment around the library is conducive to learning-clean, no noise good toilet facilities etc.	4 (5%)	6 (8%)	54 (71%)	10 (13%)
Clients are attended based on their position in the society/university	56 (74%)	6 (8%)	8 (11%)	2 (3%)
Difficult and abusive staff are made to take back what they give	61 (80%)	9 (12%)	4 (5%)	2 (3%)
Measurement of best practice in the library depend on being able to deliver and on time	8 (11%)	6 (8%)	34 (26%)	28 (37%)
Staff are fully aware of the role of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library in meeting the educational challenges of the university	10 (13%)	16 (21%)	33 (43%)	17 (22%)
Staff are aware that a defected customer is a customer and business lost.	9 (12%)	8 (11%)	18 (24%)	31 (41%)

Result

85% of the academic staff strongly agrees that staffs are ever willing and ready to attend to library clients. 89% of non academic staff strongly agrees to the same. All staff both academic and non-academic strongly disagree that there is a suggestion/complainant box through which library clients can air their feelings. 89% of academic staff and 66% of non academic staff strongly disagree that there is a quality improvement team in the library that constantly analyze situation in the library and make recommendation for improvement. 82% of non academic staff and 100% of academic staff disagree that there are notices in strategic positions in the library directing users to where they will get required information in the library. 88% of academic staff agrees that closing and opening hours of the library are governed by user demand, while 12% does not think so. 81% of academic staff agrees that they attend to library clients based on their social/academic positions in the University. Respondents from the non academic staff show that they attend to anybody irrespective of their social or academic standing. Responses from item 8, on the questionnaire show that abusive clients are abused back by the non academic staff only. Measurement of best practices in the library does not depend on the ability to deliver and on time. 64% of academic staff supported this while 63% of the non academic staff disapproves of it. Only 34% of the non-academic staff is aware of the role of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library in the University. The rest are there to make a living. 63% of the academic staff and 65% of the non-academic staff do not consider a defected customer, a lost customer.

Analysis

The staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library are always eager to assist a client. They are always neatly dressed and happy looking. All the same, the library has no facility for clients to air their feelings toward the library collection or its staff. This is a dangerous situation for any establishment; it creates a situation of self deceit. The institution might think it is doing well whereas it is performing below expectation. Moreover, good and intelligent suggestions that would have come from users are subdued. The absence of a quality improvement team in the library shows that the term "quality" has no place in the library. No wonder abusive clients are abused back by the staff. A situation that is

too dangerous for any organization. Absence of sign posts for directing users to different sections of the library is a sign of chaos in the library. Such a situation will see users wandering from one section of the library to the other looking for things a mere sign post will direct them to without waste of time and energy. Opening and closing hours in the library are user friendly. This is a very good customer care service as clients are free to use the library at a time suitable to them. Favoritism seems to be the order of the day in the library as clients are served in the library based on their position in the university/society. This means that most of the students that use the library might be passing through difficulty locating materials in the library as they hold no prestigious position in the society. It will even lead to the practices of some vices in the library as desperate students will look for some other ways to solve their problems. It is a bad omen that measurement of best practice in the library is not based on being able to deliver and on time. Such a situation as this dampens staff moral and kill initiative. It gives no value to hard work and encourages truancy. It is unfortunate that most staffs are not aware of the unique status of the university library in the educational and research challenges of the parent institution. One wonders what such staffs are doing in the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library. This re-echoes the opinion of Druker (1955) that the further staff are removed from management decision making, the more unconcerned they are to attaining organizational goals.

Recommendation

It is advised that all staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library should undergo training in customer care service. Training should also be organized for all non-academic staff of the library on the role of the university library in meeting the educational challenges of the parent organization. These trainings should not be organized as a one off activity instead it should be periodical and continuous.

The Library Administration should set up a quality improvement team immediately to evaluate whatever quality is on ground and offer solutions for improvement.

A suggestion/complainant box should be mounted at strategic positions in the library. Writing materials should be made available near the box to encourage users' air their opinions. Likewise, sign post should also be mounted at

strategic positions in the library to guard clients to their destinations without much waste of time.

Conclusion

The life wire of any organization, be it profit orientated or not, is its clients. No organization can afford to toy with its clients especially in the face of serious competition. Libraries are facing severe competition from commercial cybercafés and as such would not like to lose credibility in the face of their clients. To remain in business, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library should aim at not only satisfying its clients but at exceeding their expectations because it is easier to maintain an old customer than acquiring new one.

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