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Donald Cooper is respected by clients in over 40 industries as both a “thought leader” and a passionate visionary in the areas of marketing, service and business excellence.

Drawing from his real life experience as a world-class manufacturer, award-winning retailer and business speaker, he has helped thousands of businesses throughout the world to add more real value to their customers’ lives...and more dollars to their bottom lines.

To subscribe to Donald’s thought-provoking, idea-generating, **FREE** monthly electronic **Newsletter**, email us at newsletter@donaldcooper.com.

His website, www.donaldcooper.com also offers free articles and business tools.

Understanding your customers on a whole new level!

I was recently working with a client in the retail tire business to help them create an extraordinary customer experience. The process begins with understanding who their target customers are and what life is really like for them. I started this process by asking a series of questions to find clues about what “extraordinary” will look like for these folks. Questions like...

- a) **Who** are your target customers? What is life really like for them?
- b) What do they really **value**?
- c) What do they **fear**?
- d) When they're buying what we sell, on a very human level, what are they **trying to do**; what do they want or need to **know**...and how do they want to **feel**?

What I discovered is that this tire company simply defined its customers by the type of tires they buy. So, they had three categories of customers. Customers who buy car tires, those who buy truck tires and those who buy agriculture tires for farm equipment.

The problem is that these three categories are far too broad and will never lead to the level of profound customer understanding that, in turn, leads to creating compelling customer experiences. For example, all car tire buyers are not alike. They range from taxi fleets, to a mother with two kids and a flat tire, to a busy business person to whom every second counts. Life is very different for each of these customers and so what they need and want in an amazing experience is also very different.

Sobeys is Canada’s second largest grocery chain, so they’re trying harder. The work that they’ve done to understand what life’s really like for their customers has led to some simple but powerful service innovations. All deli sliced meats, sliced in store, are packaged in Ziploc bags so that the contents are easily resealed for convenience and freshness. Also, when you buy large family packs of items like grilling steaks, Sobeys gives you a special high quality freezer bag for the steaks that you don’t grill right away.

As a retailer of ladies fashions, some years ago, my passionate commitment to understanding what life was really like for our customers led to dozens of award-winning, profit generating innovations, such as...

- 1. A choice of **seven** free beverages, served in real mugs, when every one of our competitors had a sign on their front door that said, “*No food or beverages!*”
- 2. A magic sign on all our change rooms that invited customers to, “*Please take as many items in the change room as you wish.*”
- 3. We put four hooks in every change room. One for your clothes, one for the clothes you want to try on, one for the clothes you’ve decided to buy...and one for the clothes that you’ve decided not to buy, that have to go back and be hung up. When you think it through, it comes to four and yet no other store in the world had done it.

Understanding your customers on a whole new level! ... (Cont'd):

Profit generating innovations (*continued*):

4. I put mirrors in every change room because I thought there were certain decisions that a woman had the right to make in the privacy of her own change room.
5. We had electric reclining massage chairs all around the store for husbands and boyfriends who just wanted to relax.
6. A wonderful pirate ship play area entertained kids for hours. I once heard a 5 year old ask his mother, "Mommy, can we live here?" And the big question is, do your customers want to "live" with you?
7. Customer washrooms had change tables with three sizes of free diapers, wipes and cream. Nobody had ever done that either.
8. We had no Credit Notes. If something was not right, customers got a replacement or their money back. Customers hate credit notes!

We did lots more neat things but this gives you the idea of what's possible when you truly understand your customers at a whole new level.

Go back to the four questions at the beginning of this article. Gather together a few of the best minds and hearts in your business and start the breakthrough process of understanding what life is really like for your various types of customers. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out any of this stuff. You just need to think and feel like a customer, get creative and then have the courage to do the right thing spectacularly well.

For more information on how Donald Cooper can help you redefine and reinvent your business to create, deliver and communicate compelling, customer-owning Value, visit our website at www.donaldcooper.com , email us at sharen@donaldcooper.com or contact us by telephone in Toronto, Canada at 1-(416) 252-3704.