External Partnership Management: 
Customer Loyalty

Attract and retain loyal customers: One of the most important relationships you need to develop and maintain is the relationship with your customers. What determines customer loyalty? What can you do to attract loyalty and initiate the relationship? What can you do to maintain the relationship? Figuring out how to attract and retain loyal customers is not always easy. Chip Bell, customer service expert, offers these five drivers, stating that most work with most customers, most of the time!

- Include customers in the service experience. Allowing them the opportunity to help create the service or product generates energy. This is why the grill-your-own-steak restaurants have a certain following. When customers have a chance to be included in the preparation they feel as if they have “skin in the game.”

- Do it right. Customers are loyal to organizations that make sure the basics are always done perfectly—even though customers do not cheer about it. For example, if a commercial plane lands in the correct city on time, customers do not offer accolades. On the other hand, if it is late and ends up in the wrong city, customers will complain.

- Understand—really understand—what customers need. Service goes deeper than just meeting a customer’s need. Great service providers are great listeners. They know the importance of solving customers’ problems. It requires building rapport and gaining trust. It requires them to stand in the customers’ shoes.

- Surprise your customers. They want a bit of sparkle and glitter, a light-up stir stick in their martini! Attracting customer loyalty requires thinking of service as an attraction. Think of customer service as a box of Cracker Jacks. What is the free prize inside?

- Inspire customers. Service moves customers when it comes from people who are passionate about their work. Customers want to return when they have had an encounter with the wholesomeness of people who want to do things right.

Loyal customers become your sales force, championing you to others at work, through blogs, and on websites. Loyal customers feel committed to you, and that connects them to you emotionally. Since they see the business and emotional value, they’ll often pay more.

Review Bell’s five drivers for earning customer loyalty. Identify ideas in each category that could initiate, develop, and maintain customer loyalty in your organization. Your ability to lead begins with ensuring customer loyalty.