

“We are not in the coffee business serving people. We are in the people business serving coffee” – Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks

I like drinking coffee. Usually, before coming to work, I will drop by at Starbucks to buy a cup of coffee, not because of the taste or the cool brand, but because of their service. I can't tell why I like them. I just feel good walking in the shop and meet friendly staff who are always ready to serve their customers

I used to ask myself and some of my friends why we were willing to pay more at Starbucks while we could use the same amount of money to buy 2 cups of coffee somewhere else.

Some told me that they liked the taste of the coffee. Others said they loved the tempting smell of roasted coffee and couldn't help walking in whenever they passed the shop.

But I think the key to Starbucks's success is their ability to see things that their competitors haven't recognized and utilize that knowledge before others start to follow.

Yes, I am talking about their courage to change the way they look at their business. Instead of focusing only on product quality, they shifted to focus on delivering good service and building good customer experiences.

Starbucks doesn't think that they are in the coffee business. They think they are in the business where 'people' are the center of everything they do. It doesn't matter how good your products are if you don't know how to serve them in such a way that touch the people's hearts.

Similar to other industries, be they airlines, hotels or banking, they have also shifted to compete on service. This is because today's business world has changed. Having technology or money isn't enough anymore. Your competitors can have them too.

Singapore Airlines is another good example of how a company can surpass its competitors by delivering good service. Singapore Airlines knows that other companies can buy the same planes from the same vendor. They can demand how luxurious or how technological advanced they want their planes to be as well. So, Singapore Airlines decided to differentiate itself through quality service that makes customers feel good and want to come back again.

People often ask me what I think the mobile market will look like in the future. I think the market will follow other industries in terms of shifting from being technology-focused to service-focused.

Today, mobile phones have become a consumer product. Everyone has it because of cheap price and low tariff. In the past, mobile phones were perceived as high-tech gadget for rich people. Even operators also talked a lot about technology, be they network or value-added services. That's why the one with good network had a huge advantage over those who didn't.

But today, every operator has more or less the same network, same clear signal and about the same call tariffs. Therefore, network and price are becoming basic things customers can find from any operator in the market. And now they begin to have higher expectation and are becoming more demanding on quality of service.

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So, the turning point factors for this industry are 'people' and 'service'

When I talk about 'people', I mean both our own people and customers

When I talk about service, I mean all of the touch points, not only service halls or call centers.

To give good service, you must start from your own people, making your staff having service mind. You must create a good relation between your people and your customers through good service. In other words, customers will be happy and feel emotional attached to the service if they can feel that the service is given by those who care and are willing to serve them. At the same time, the staff will be proud and satisfied to know that their services are well appreciated by the ones they serve.

Of course, this is easier said than done. There are a lot to learn. Developing people, changing the way people think, creating service culture, expanding service channels to be most convenient to customers always take time.

But I hope that one day when asking a customer why they chose us, he will not be able to pinpoint the reason. This will mean that he is so happy in every aspect across all touch points that he can't tell us why. He simply knows that he trusts us and wants to continue using us.

I also hope that one day when asking a staff why he chose us as his employer, he will not be able to pinpoint the reason. Because this will mean that he is so happy with his job and all the benefits he gets that he wants to come to work everyday to serve his customers without having a thought of leaving to other companies.

When that day comes, I think we can claim that we are no longer in the mobile phone business anymore. But we are in the 'people' business, serving mobile services instead.