

Exceeding Customer Expectations at Lenscrafters in Salt Lake City, USA



A. THE SITUATION

In late March of 2003, I had the opportunity to return to the Salt Lake City (SLC), Utah area for my annual trip to the Rocky Mountains and the “greatest snow on Earth,” as it is promoted from the Chamber of Commerce viewpoint. I have visited Salt Lake City probably 15 times over the last 20 years in a regular “meeting” with some members of my family on the slopes of Utah. In this particular year, this multi-day event involved initially my 13-year-old son and myself, from Tallahassee, Florida, to be joined by my sister from Rochester, New York.

My son and I arrived on Tuesday evening, March 25th, and went straight to our hotel in the downtown section of the city. On Wednesday morning, March 26th, we awoke to a beautiful, blue-sky day and proceeded to our chosen ski destination at Brighton in the Wasatch mountain range. It promised to be a wonderful day on the ski slopes.

However, the prospect for a wonderful day had changed by noon. In brief, my son had an unfortunate accident on the Brighton ski trails and was rushed to the Primary Children’s Medical Care Center on the outskirts of Salt Lake City.

B. THE SERVICE OPPORTUNITY

Once my son’s physical injuries (surgery was required on his left elbow) and overall medical condition had been attended to by the medical staff, on Thursday, March 27th, we then began to consider his other needs for returning him to some sense of normalcy as he recovered in the hospital. One of his first requests was to have his eyeglasses replaced (so he could watch Television, just maybe...!) as they had been lost and/or damaged in his skiing mishap.

I began our glasses replacement process by locating the downtown SLC Lenscrafters store and going there to purchase his prescription lenses and frames. At around noon on March 27th, I walked into the downtown store, along with his glasses prescription, that my wife had faxed to me from Tallahassee to our hotel. At that point I was introduced to Ms. Stephanie Vicars, the Lenscrafters Store Manager, and I explained my customer situation and what I needed.

After describing my order preferences, Ms. Vicars, asked what type of frames my son would like, styles, color choices, and such. Now, I have been called an adventuresome and risk-taking person by some, but selecting glasses styles and colors for a 13 year-old teenager was not something I had done before. So I replied that I would have to check with Andre, my son, at the hospital 8 – 10 miles away, another trip up and back, which would take a few hours, I thought.

C. THE EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY – PART 1

To my surprise, my driving concerns were immediately put to rest by the next offer of service from Ms. Vickers. Even though I initially offered her a ride, she said she would gladly drive herself from the downtown SLC LensCrafters store, 8 – 10 miles, directly to the hospital room and bed where Andre was recovering. She said we needed to do that to properly “test out” several versions of frames on our “final user” customer.

By approximately 30 minutes later in the afternoon, Ms. Vickers was in Andre’s hospital room, and presented him with 4 or 5 choices of eyeglass frames and styles. She patiently helped Andre try on each frame, check his appearance in a mirror, and to finally make a choice as to the specific one he wanted. This selection process was completed by about 2:00 PM, when she then returned to the downtown store to have the lenses made and fitted to his chosen frame.

I would categorize this “hospital room customer visit” as her first “above and beyond” exceptional customer service event. Lenscrafters, in the form of Ms. Vickers, based on my normal expectations, had very little, if any, reason to go out of her way in this manner. She could have required me, the “buying customer,” to do all of this additional “leg work and driving work”, by saying: “We only do glasses,” or something to that effect, and I probably would have accepted that response, and maybe walk out grumbling under my breath.

Nevertheless, Lenscrafters chose to anticipate my customer expectations and then to exceed them by offering this extended level of service. This at a time when I had other things to worry about.....my son’s physical injuries, his recovering, and related matters. Given my situation, all of this exceptional Lenscrafters service occurred without any encouragement on my part - it was already an element of the expected action and behavior of Ms. Vickers. As she finished her “on site” eyeglass selection process with my son, I concluded that this transaction, in and of itself, was exceptional.

D. THE EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY – PART 2

Next was part 2 of the story – the glasses had to be made and then picked up. As Ms. Vickers was preparing to leave our hospital room, we discussed the amount of time it would take to make the glasses and when they would be ready for me to pick up at the downtown store. But, yet again, the exceptional customer service focus of Lenscrafters became evident: Ms Vickers said she would return to the store (another 8- 10 miles), have the glasses made, and then would have the “finished product” delivered right back directly to Andre again, there in his hospital room.

And they did exactly that. By around 5:00 PM on that Thursday, March 27th, we had Andre’s chosen eyeglasses, manufactured to his specific prescription, hand delivered by one of Ms. Vickers’s assistants to his bedside in the hospital. In addition, that same Lenscrafters assistant (Lab Manager, Kyle Perry) spent the “value added” extra 5 – 10 minutes with Andre, making sure they fit properly, were exactly what we had ordered, and verified that all items for the purchase were complete. Both parties had completed a commercial business transaction highly satisfied that all customers involved had been served.

E. WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THIS BEHAVIOR, WHY DID IT OCCUR?

As an individual who has been associated with studying, examining, observing, and reporting on “quality” customer service on and off for over 20 years, this personal Lenscrafters consumer transaction

represents a proven example of superior customer service. What accounts for this behavior on the part of Lenscrafters, why did it occur? Here is the Lenscrafters reply in a nutshell.

This transaction exemplifies superior customer service at the most basic, fundamental human level. It exemplifies going beyond simply delivering a product. When I asked Ms. Vickers in a phone call later what explained her sensitivity to my son's needs and her willingness to "go the extra mile," she said: "Oh yes, our company builds that sense of sensitivity through our "Give the Gift of Sight" program, where we as employees have the opportunity to travel for 2 weeks during the year to developing countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico."

As I discovered from reviewing the 2002 Lenscrafters Gift of Sight Annual Report, during those international missions their focus is on delivering exams and glasses to disadvantaged people, where their service is the only chance for them to receive glasses – vision, from the Lenscrafters perspective, is a basic human right...not a luxury.

By promoting these 2 week learning experiences for their employees, Lenscrafters creates or strengthens their commitment to customer service: The what and the why that you provide to the disadvantaged is the same as the what and the why that you provide to your "normal" customers in the developed world, whether that be in Salt Lake City or elsewhere. It is the right thing to do, regardless of where the customer is located.

My son and I were the fortunate recipients of this level of exceptional Lenscrafter service commitment. I can only hope that other businesses and organizations, whether public or private, can learn from this simple transaction. Customer service was alive and well at Lenscrafters in Salt Lake City in March of 2003. This is due in large part, I believe, to the fact that the importance of valued service to the individual existed in both the staff and the operational philosophy of the Lenscrafter organization, as supported by the "Give the Gift of Sight" initiative.

A copy of this success story is being sent to Ms. Tamie Welk, Regional Director of Operations in Murray, Utah, so Ms. Vickers can receive her well-earned recognition across the Lenscrafter organization.

About the Author



Dale Weeks is a ROES with Organizational Excellence Specialists and located in the United States. He has earned a BSc (Mathematics) and MBA (Finance). He is a seasoned professional with proven business results and has been involved in leadership and management positions with innovative public and private sector entities such as: Minnesota Department of Revenue, Florida Department of Revenue, Control Data Corporation, General Mills and Xerox Corporation. As a volunteer, he has served on the Board of the Global

Benchmarking Network. Areas of specialty include: leading change, strategic thinking, performance management, global benchmarking and operational plan execution. Email: dfwglba@gmail.com