

*Right*  
**PEOPLE...**

*Right*  
**TIME...**

**BEST**

**SERVICE!**



*Increase Productivity and Satisfaction*

By Ken Heymann, COO, UniFocus

**M**any years ago, before the days of TSA, customer kiosks, and on line boarding passes, I went to an airport to take a flight...



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The carrier in question had nine people in the service area. Six were at the check-in desks, two were out front of the desks, and one was over on the side. Three of the agents were helping customers. Two of the customers had problems. I arrived approximately 40 minutes before my flight (back in the day when you could get your boarding pass and get right on the plane). There were seven people on line. With three customers at the desk and seven on line, there were nine agents for ten customers. While I waited on line, the three unoccupied agents were engaged in conversation while the other two agents simply ignored us, leaving the working agents to help the two customers with problems. Finally, there was one agent to slowly assist the customers in line. I missed my flight.

I wrote the airline to share my frustration about the terrible service and received a lovely letter explaining that the carrier makes every effort to ensure sufficient staff is available to meet guest needs, but that, sometimes, demand simply exceeds capacity and they were sorry I was disappointed. I wrote back. "You don't understand. You were not understaffed. The customers were practically outnumbered by your staff. They just didn't pay attention." I got another nice letter. I stopped writing. I also stopped flying the carrier as this was back in the day when the consumer had more than three or four choices.

I know I'm not alone in this experience. It's happened to me in restaurants too. You walk in, the place is empty, there are several servers milling around and chatting. And the next time you turn around you realize that you still haven't been served and you notice that all the servers seem to be congregating in the back or in the kitchen. They're enjoying a nice chat while you fume and marvel that the restaurant could be so empty and attention to the guest so poor.

How, you may wonder, could this be so common an occurrence? How could employees be so disconnected from the work they perform which, in many cases, provides the bulk of their income as they



are tipped employees? And, ironically, how can this scenario be so damaging to profitability with so many people serving so few?

I have spent some thirty years working with organizations to help them achieve three simple goals – having the right people at the right time providing the right kind of service. The right people are those who are properly trained and are engaged. An engaged employee is aware of what is happening and is paying attention to your guests and to your business. The right time is the appropriate number of staff available when customers want service. It's important to have the correct number so that employees are sufficiently occupied and can get into the rhythm of the work day. And, finally,

the right kind of service is the service the customer is buying based on the promises the organization has made. This means that the service and product quality are appropriate for the price being charged.

That all said, I want to focus on the second "right." As I've noted, the service is often poor when there are too many staff members and, as a result, they are not engaged in servicing your customers. When there is the appropriate balance between staff and customers, the staff is actively engaged, working at the right pace and taking care of the customers.

This is also the most efficient environment. Certainly, there are genuine circumstances in which there is insufficient staff (while nine

agents were too many, one would have been insufficient). However, the process one must go through in order to ensure that there aren't too many people is the same process one must go through in order to ensure that there aren't too few.

By carefully assessing the length of time to deliver the desired service, then studying the patterns of demand for that service (when customers want service), and determining the total demand (how many people need to be served) a staffing model can be built which matches the two and ensures more consistent and productive service. You give better service at a better cost.

Granted, for those of you already making the argument in your head, any single customer may require more or less time, which only proves that there are exceptions and one can't plan for or anticipate all exceptions. (And, in the service business,

there are exceptions and demand is not always consistent). But if organizations produce budgets, which are a broad effort to match revenues and costs on a monthly basis, why not apply the same discipline to the more manageable period of a day or a shift? If you know how many people

need service (a better measure than how many dollars need service) and how long it takes to serve them, you can avoid the poor service and lost cost that results from over-staffing just as you can ensure that you are not understaffed.

There may be times when the plan fails. But even in the failure you have an opportunity to critique the day. With no plan, with no analysis, there is no means to critique and improve. Thus, if you work to balance

productivity with guest satisfaction you are better equipped to improve in both areas. 

