

THE PLATINUM RULE OF SERVICE

By Richard D. Hanks; President, Mindshare Technologies

Years ago I attended a seminar where a consultant introduced the audience to the concept of The Platinum Rule. Most of us are familiar with the Golden Rule and many people strive to live by it:

“Do unto others as **you** would have them do unto **you**.”

Dr. Alessandra introduced us to the concept of **The Platinum Rule**

“Do unto others as **they** would have you do unto **them**.”

“Treat others how you want to be treated” has been endorsed by all the great world religions. Jesus and Confucius used it to summarize their ethical teachings. The Golden rule teaches consistency and fairness between people.

The Platinum Rule builds on the Golden Rule for our more individualistic society by recognizing that we have very different preferences than those around us. Said more simply; people may not like what you like - give them what they like, not what you like.

“I want my bath to run hot in two minutes flat. I don't want to hear plumbing noises. I want a good bed and pillows. I want my breakfast right away. I want good croissants. I want people to be polite to me, and I don't want to hear their side of their story.”

Baron Rothchild

There are opportunities to practice the Platinum Rule all around us. Some examples: My wife and I decided (misguidedly) to diet straight through the Holidays this year. We watched helplessly while kind friends brought wave after wave of unwanted cookies, candy, and cake to our home. On the other hand, one thoughtful neighbor brought us a box of balanced diet bars. Perhaps you enjoy speaking in meetings, so you assume others do too. You invite someone else to present her opinion in public, but she has stage fright and embarrassed, sputters something. Then there is the old story of the Boy Scout who assisted the elderly lady across the street, only to discover that she didn't want to cross the street.

The Platinum Rule is also about empathy. Teaching children and adults the skill of empathy would decrease a lot of the misery in the world. Empathy means that you put yourself in the other person's shoes and treat them accordingly. Do not assume that others want what you want.

Our company's exposure to the Platinum Rule has come by watching truly great service companies capitalize on it by providing extraordinary experiences for their customers. This simple concept can make all the difference in the way a Service Provider designs and executes its Product and Service offerings. The focus shifts from “this is what I want, so I'll give it to everyone,” to “first I need to understand what customers want and then I'll give it to them.” The key is to listen and observe what a customer needs or appreciates and then try to satisfy those needs.

Alfred B. Sloan, Former Chairman of General Motors said it best:

“The quickest way to profits is to serve the customer in the way the customer wants to be served.”

At Mindshare we provide automated customer feedback across more than 20 service industries, which gives us a front-row seat to a wide range of customers' perceptions of service. For example, let's take the case of what I call "**Chatty Cathy**" in the Salon industry. It's a fact that many people go to the barbershop or beauty salon for two main reasons; (1) Get a haircut, and (2) engage in pleasant conversation with a stylist. A talkative, chatting stylist fits this need exactly. But some of us just want to be left alone. A haircut is a time of thoughtful contemplation about . well, nothing. How do the truly great Salon companies use this need to their advantage? They note the customer's preference each time they visit, and then meet those expectations. Some even go so far as to ask the customer if "he feels like talking today?"

A fabulous Chinese restaurant I visit asks the following question as the patrons are seated, "Would you like me to leave a pitcher of water on the table, or would you prefer I fill your glasses throughout the evening?"

I've always loved the quote by the famous Baron Rothchild upon the opening of his hotel in Paris in the 1950's.

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In Mindshare's experience, the practical application of The Platinum Rule of Service is fairly simple:

- 1) Find out what customers want
- 2) Develop a way to give it to them
- 3) Monitor delivery to make sure they're receiving it (e.g. real-time customer surveys)
- 4) Make adjustments to improve operational execution. (e.g. immediate training or process changes)

One favorite example comes from a Mindshare Seafood Restaurant Client. Real-time customer surveys pointed out complaints of "no clams in my clam chowder" from several guests. The store manager was able to fix the problem the next morning by having the new waiter listen to the customer comments from the night before, and then training him to stir the soup before serving individual bowls. Why? Because clams sink to the bottom of the pot. One minor change made a huge difference in their business.

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Here's another frequent feedback example from multiple clients, especially health care patients and automotive customers: "Tell me when you won't get to me on time. I don't mind waiting - what I mind is you not telling me and just letting me sit there." The key in this situation is to not let what is convenient for your business take precedence over what is convenient for your customers.

The Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is an excellent rule for ethical treatment of others. The Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as they prefer to be done unto," is an excellent rule for providing tailored customer service offerings in a world of sameness. That is, treat other people the way that they want to be treated, not the way that you want to be treated, because they are not you.

Richard D. Hanks is President of Mindshare, the leading provider of real-time, automated customer feedback solutions.