From years of studying and working with world-class customer service organizations, I have found 10 common principles that differentiate these organizations from others and elevate them to a higher level of customer care. These commandments of world-class service are irrefutable—they do not change or become obsolete.

Just as important as the commandments themselves is their order, here referred to as the chain of commandments. The commandments are arranged in the precise sequence necessary for an organization to provide a world-class customer experience. It is impossible for an organization to reach its optimum level of service attitude and customer satisfaction without proficiently executing each commandment.

**CHAIN OF COMMANDMENTS**

1. **Service vision: Have a clear purpose of why the business exists.** First and foremost, every organization that provides superior service has a strong service vision that creates a clear direction for everyone in the business. This vision must include the true underlying purpose of what your practice brings to the community and what your patients can get from you that they cannot get elsewhere.

   Without a clear service vision that is articulated to your staff, your practice is a commodity. Why is your practice in existence? What is its purpose? Does each of your employees understand the crucial part they play within the practice? Is it the surgery you provide or, maybe, the quality of life you enhance?

   You must create the service vision before anything else can take shape in your practice. The service vision drives all aspects of the business, including hiring, standards, training, and leadership philosophies. Without the service vision, you are like a pilot without a flight plan. How will you know where you are headed?

2. **Create a world-class internal culture: Attract, hire, and retain only the people who have the service DNA.** The people you want to hire and retain are those who are capable of upholding the service vision of the practice. Using your service vision as a blueprint, recruit and retain the proper staff to build a culture of people who want to be part of something more. Develop an exciting team that truly impacts and changes lives and remove those people who do not follow your service vision.

   Every practice should have nonnegotiable hiring standards, which, once articulated on the first interview (of several), scares more people away than it attracts. Make people earn the right to be part of your culture and legacy. Don’t let it be for everyone.

3. **Establish nonnegotiable experiential standards that everyone must follow.** Experiential standards should be set for each stage of the organization’s customer experience cycle. These nonnegotiable standards allow employees to provide a consistent engaging experience that is unlike that of the majority of competitors. Employees must regularly execute each of these standards.

   The majority of medical practices have strong operational and technical procedures but extremely lack in experiential actions. Scheduling an appointment or pre- and postoperative consultations are operational actions that leave no memorable impression. It is the practices that add a layer of experiential nonnegotiable standards, such as using the patient’s name two to four times dur-
ing every encounter, asking if there is anything else you
can do for them at the completion of every interaction,
and personalizing their experience at every visit, even
first-time patients, that win over patients.

4. Secret service systems: Utilize customer intelli-

gence to personalize the experience and engage and
anticipate the patient’s needs. Create secret service
systems that easily enable front-line employees to
personalize the customer’s experience by engaging,
anticipating, and delivering his needs. Creating a system
of silent cues, visual triggers, and ways to collect and
utilize patient intelligence creates an emotional bond
that turns your patients into raving alumni of your
practice.

Silent cues and visual triggers are crucial components
of any secret service system. It can be as simple as the
color of their chart—notifying all employees if this is a
new, returning, refractive, or cataract patient—or using
the database to post patient’s personal information,
including kids’ names, profession, and even their annual
vacation, so it can be used during the next encounter.

5. Training to providing a world-class customer
experience: Use systems and processes that remove
variation and provide a consistent customer experience.
Create an incredible training program for all new and
existing employees. The program should consist of soft-
skill training to increase their service aptitude, giving
them the knowledge and tools required to provide a
world-class customer experience.

Again, the majority of practices that train their new
employees focus on the technical and operational skills
of the job, with virtually no time spent on the soft skills
of communication and relationship building. It is impera-
tive that every new and existing employee complete
patient experience training, or boot camp, that teaches
the importance of systems that allow your team to pro-
duce a consistent world-class patient experience.

6. Implementation and execution: How to go from
ideas on a paper to consistent execution. Front-line
employees must consistently execute a solid process that
allows realistic implementation of the customer service
initiatives and systems. Without execution, systems in
manuals are nothing more than ideas on paper. This is
where most companies fail. Management must demon-
strate the importance of consistently executing these sys-
tems, the practice’s promise, and holding employees
accountable for their own service. In essence, by failing to
deliver the experience promised, an employee is taking
money out of the safe.

7. Zero risk: Anticipate your service defects and set pro-
tocols to make it right. Train your employees to not only
reduce the areas in which your practice drops the ball but
Teach them how to pick it up. As a result, patients will be
more loyal and delighted when something went wrong than
had everything gone right. Even front-line employees need
to have the training and permission to take care of prob-
lems, for example, sending the patient a gift card to a local
restaurant for their inconvenience.

8. Create an above-and-beyond culture: Ensure con-
stant awareness and branding of how to be a hero. Create
an awareness of the most common opportunities where
employees can deliver heroic service for the customer that
creates an above-and-beyond culture. Do your employees
know the most common opportunities to exceed patient
expectations? It might be having a congratulations card
waiting for the patient upon their arrival because of some-
thing they said when making their appointment or offering
to pick them up or take them home.

9. Measure your customer’s experience: What gets
measured gets managed. Use a scientific method to
measure your customer’s experience and satisfaction,
providing benchmarks for performance in each location
and/or department. Your goals must be measurable.
How satisfied are your customers with you? Who is per-
forming well? Who is inconsistent? Are you keeping your
service brand promise to your customers? How effective
is your service recovery? How do you stack up against
your competition?

10. World-class leadership: Walk the talk. Every
world-class customer service organization is world class
to work for. It takes world-class leadership to provide
passion, inspiration, and discipline to all employees.
Although this is the final commandment, it is the most
important and has the most impact and responsibility
for the success of all 10 commandments. In every world-
class practice, the leaders must wear the practice’s service
vision on their sleeve. Leaders need to focus on only
motivating one person every day—theirselfs!

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