

Setting customer expectations

I just came back from a mini-vacation to visit family in New York City. It was lots of fun—there was lots of walking, and lots of eating. But great time aside, I noticed that different vendors/organizations set expectations differently. Setting customer expectations early and clearly helps ensure your customers have a good experience with your organization.

Either put those jackets back on or tie them around your waist

My cousin and I visited the Jewish Museum in New York. It was warm in the building and once we got to the floor for the special exhibit we were there to see, we had removed our winter coats and had them draped over our arms. Within seconds, a guard was telling us we had to put the coats on or tie them around our waist. It was too late to go back down to the coat check so we both put the coats around our shoulders. But we were uncomfortably warm. The woman at the admissions desk could have told us to check our coats. She could've given us a map of the museum or some (any) information. She did nothing but take our money and give us tickets. She, and the museum itself, did not set expectations properly. (P.S.: Directly after the Jewish Museum, I went to the Met. The guards there do not care if you carry your coat.)

Wagamama knows how to do it

Wagamama is a British chain of Asian-style food. They've only recently expanded to the United States with a couple restaurants in New York City. Most Americans are probably not familiar with the chain, and the first question my server asked was whether I had dined at Wagamama before (I have). Since Wagamama has a quirky way of serving—they mark your order on your placemat and then bring out food as it's ready—the waiter wanted to set my expectations. Like I said I have dined there, but I appreciated the reminder (it'd been a

long time).

Vamoose is confuse(d)—and uneven

I've taken Vamoose before, and I thought I knew how they operate. For example, I know that when you get to the designated pick up stop, there will be a line to get on the bus. Obviously, the closer to the front of the line you are, the more likely you will be able to sit where you prefer. On the trip from DC to New York, the bus attendants gave out water and newspapers. But after getting on the bus, there was not a word from anybody. Nobody told us about WiFi, lights, bathrooms/rest stops, how long the trip was expected to take, nothing. The driver did not utter a word until about two and half hours into the ride, and that was *after* he stopped at a rest stop and then all he told us was that we had fifteen minutes to use the facilities.

On the return trip, when I got to the stop in New York, I wanted to make sure there would be water, and I asked the attendant if they would give it out. He didn't know. Based on my experience and expectation, they would hand out water, but I decided not to take any chances and went to buy some. Good thing I did because there was no water to be had from Vamoose. In other words, they did not meet an expectation, nor did they set it appropriately.

Once I got on the bus, one of the attendants gave a detailed announcement about the WiFi, travel time, bathroom availability, and also, telling people to keep conversations short and phones on mute. That was a plus and something that had not been done on the trip there. It was a good thing the attendant gave that information, because for the rest of the trip, there was not one word from the driver. He did not stop at all. He did not even announce that we had arrived at the first stop in the DC area, or how long the bus would be there to offload passengers.

None of these experiences changes my opinion on the organization/business. I would still attend the Jewish Museum in the future, still eat at Wagamama, and still ride the Vamoose to New York. I chose these organizations for specific reasons—interest in the exhibit (museum), type of food and ambiance (Wagamama), and convenience and price (Vamoose).

Even though you choose to do business with companies and organizations in spite of any shortcomings, those that are able to set, manage, and most importantly, meet customer expectations will provide a more enjoyable customer experience.