



Dr. Mritunjay Athreya awarded the Padma Bhushan

Dr. Mritunjay Athreya has been very closely associated with the Custommerce Service Excellence Foundation. He was the mentor of the movement in its early days and subsequently chairman of the board. Dr. Athreya worked closely with the board in shaping the vision, mission and was instrumental in bringing in structure and governance to Custommerce. He provided impetus and direction that enabled the movement to morph into its present status as a section 25 company. His knowledge and expertise in management has guided the growth and development of Custommerce.



Dr. Athreya completed his doctorate in Business Administration from Harvard Business School, Boston, USA in 1967. He is an alumnus of Stanford Business School, California, USA and Loyola College, Chennai. He is also a qualified cost accountant, with all-India first rank and gold medals in both intermediate and final examinations of the Institute of Cost Accountants.

Dr. Athreya joined the faculty of the Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata, as early as 1967. He is now a name synonymous with Indian management and has been an icon of management to several generations of Indian managers, management teachers, trainers, consultants and students. Over the last four-plus decades, he has advised enterprises in several sectors, such as Oil & Gas, Power, Fertilizers, Steel, Automobiles, Banking, Insurance, IT and Healthcare. He has served in many government policy committees. The best known is the 1991 Athreya Committee on Indian Telecom Restructuring of which he was the chairman.

We are immensely pleased that Dr. Athreya has been honored with the Padma Bhushan award by the Government of India this Republic Day for his contribution in the field of management education. This is in addition to the Icon of the Year award by Cost Accountants of India in February 2014 and the Life Time Contribution Award conferred by Dr. Shashi Tharoor, HRD Minister, Gol, on behalf of Thinkers50 India in 2013.

Dr. Athreya, we are honored to have worked with you. Thank you for everything you brought to the Custommerce movement. We could not have done it without your support and expert advice.

Custommerce National Convention 2014 – Feedback



An ideal mix and match of issues and challenges of 'today' and crystal ball gazing towards a futuristic 'day after tomorrow' with discussions to bridge the gap - Kamal Bajwa, Chief Customer Operations Officer, Tata Sky

All very interesting topics covered in a smooth manner for easy understanding / implementation. A well-organized programme. - Shashi Kumar, Chief Manager, State Bank of India

A true insight on what makes an organization the most successful in terms of retaining and creating customers on today's competitive environment. And the importance of 'trust, delegation and commitment'. - Subhashish Das, Zonal Sales Manager - TICI

Excellent Event. Great content and perspective shared which is very relevant to organizations. Keep it up! - Samir Kale, Sales Director, BFSI – NICE South Asia



Customer service at the grassroots

In this section we attempt to understand what is being done at the breeding grounds of tomorrow's managers - B-Schools - to sensitize them about customer service. We feature thoughts from the faculty at B-Schools about what steps can be taken to improve the current status.

Prof. Sridar Natarajan is Dean at Chennai Business School (CBS) since 2007. He handles Quantitative Techniques and Financial Management as part of the General Management course and Derivatives for the BFS varsity. Prof. Natarajan is a Metallurgical Engineer from IIT Kharagpur and completed his PGDBM from IIM Bangalore, specializing in Finance and Systems.



Q. What do you think B-Schools offer presently to sensitize students about good customer service?

A. B-School curriculum today is structured such that customer services management is primarily dealt with in the specialization stream of marketing; it is not clearly covered in the HR and Finance streams. Within the marketing stream, the course that talks about customer service and management is the course on CRM. This subject covers how effective CRM can help organizations meet customer expectations. Unfortunately this course is not offered by all B-Schools. We need to understand that there are two types of B-Schools: Those which are affiliated to a local university, where autonomy is not high and the flexibility of curriculum with the management is low. The other type which I prefer to call true B-Schools, have a greater degree of autonomy, and clearly address this subject in the curriculum as CRM or under another name. They enhance learning through curriculum and co-curricular activities. The way they structure the course depends a lot on the leadership in these schools - how experimental they are willing to be. At present, students are taught through case studies. Simulated learning has its advantages especially if good case studies on customer service are picked.

However for a better understanding you need to do a little more. For example we allow students to organize a *me/la*, where we simulate a supermarket that is handled by the management students. Students from other streams are asked to be customers. Now the 'vendors' have no idea who the target audience is. They learn about their customer, their likes and dislikes over the course of the three days. The students are judged based on how well they are able to meet their customer expectations. They deal with customer dissatisfaction and losing prospective customers. This helps them learn the importance of keeping up to the promises made to customers and meeting expectations that they have created. I put this idea across when I was invited by IIM Ahmedabad to explain what smaller B-Schools do innovatively in their teaching. It was well received.

Q. What can B-Schools do to make students more sensitive towards customer centricity?

A. B-Schools should primarily think of students as their customers. However not many buy into this idea. Here at CBS, when we plan for our courses, students can discuss and tell the management what they would want included. So a course is not set in stone, but instead faculty makes a proposal and find out students' preference. When you do this you're already making them understand customer centricity. Secondly, we take our feedback very seriously. In a term we take feedback twice, the feedback is confidential and a committee is set up to discuss suggestions. This feedback involves the content (product) and the delivery (service). This makes students understand the importance of feedback in customer service management, it is learning through experience. Thirdly, with regard to placements we find out which companies students look to interview for. We try to get our students their dream jobs. Here again we see students as customers and look to meet their expectations.

As I mentioned earlier, Customer Relationship Management as a subject is delivered primarily to marketing students. B-Schools need to realize that this subject needs to be taught even to students of other specializations, because it is important for every function of a company to be customer centric. This is something that I look to implement at CBS shortly.

Q. How can organizations contribute to cultivating a customer-centric mindset in B-School graduates?

A. The challenge today is that a lot of senior managers in the corporate world are detached from modern modes of media especially social media. This problem also exists in colleges, where faculty is old-school and tends to dismiss social media as unimportant and a 'distraction' without realizing that it is the future. Marketing executives in very traditional organizations may not even know about Facebook or the power of Facebook. One thing organizations should do is admit lack of knowledge in this area and allow the younger executives to go and interact with college students. These young executives will be more clued in about more recent trends in marketing and social media and students will be able to relate better to them and understand how customers are now using media like this to reach out to companies. Nowadays people are actively talking about products and services they use on Twitter and Facebook, if companies do not monitor and respond quickly especially to criticism, it can be disastrous for their brand.

Another area where corporates can proactively help is through internships. Corporates can drive home the importance of customer experience management by treating interns as their customers and through this experience make them industry-ready to serve customers better.

Organizations will benefit from students having a customer-centric attitude, especially if customer centricity is one of their pillars. But it could create a dilemma in the mind of a graduate, if the organization he / she enters into does not perceive it as something important. Nevertheless with more students across specializations learning about providing good customer experiences, the trend should change towards more customer-centric organizations from the ground level up.

Customer Service Excellence Foundation is a not-for-profit organization striving to create a customer experience driven, globally competitive Indian economy.

Conceived & incubated by



Patron Members



Send your feedback to Biron D'Souza (Email: biron@customer.org, Ph: +91-44-61084280).