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Loyalty: A Conversation With Gold's Gym Hall of Fame Inductee Blair McHaney

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Customer loyalty in the fitness industry tends toward either extreme, as clients generally either commit to their new routine or fall off and spend the remainder of the contract's term wishing they could cancel. A well-structured onboarding process is key to a successful customer retention strategy, according to Blair McHaney, owner of two [Gold's Gym franchises](#) in Central Washington and Director Emeritus of [Gold's Gym Franchisee Association](#). He is also the only franchisee in the organization's history to both win its three most important awards and be inducted into the Gold's Gym Hall of Fame alongside *The Incredible Hulk's* Lou Ferrigno and gym founder, Joe Gold.

Customer Experience Report caught up with McHaney during the 2014 Customer Service Experience Conference and discussed successful customer loyalty strategies, learning curves and the importance of a well-trained staff.

CER: Gold's Gym in general and your gyms specifically have experienced significant long-term customer loyalty success. What success strategies could be applied across other industries?

Blair McHaney: The first thing is just this recognition that –let your front lines actually deliver the product. You've got to let them deliver on any loyalty promise. You can't try to mandate every action or tactic that people take in order to grow loyalty. It doesn't really matter if it's a gym or hotel or anything else. When you run into policies consistently that are tough on the customer experience, that's when you see that it's usually the C-suite that's gotten in the way of delivering a great customer experience. You want to build a violin? Here's some two by fours and a hammer. But I think that's the same anywhere. I don't think it's different in any organization.

CER: What common challenges have you experienced while driving customer service?

Blair



Blair McHaney, owner of two Gold's Gym franchises in Central Washington and Director Emeritus of Gold's Gym Franchisee Association

McHaney: When you accept that customer experience management is going to be a business discipline, that means that there's a lot of business process implications. You're never going to be a great practitioner from Day One. So then your program has to evolve over time. And the more sophisticated you get, the deeper you dig on those things that are causing negative experience or those things that cause people to not be as open about identifying processes that should be improved. Everybody will find their way back to how they hire, onboard, train, develop and educate their people. If you're gonna get excellent at this, excellence will be driven. You'll always end up back at that point at some point.

CER: Has it been a trial and error or - ?

Blair McHaney: I don't think it's so much trial and error. I think it's more strategy and urgency. Companies have some kind of strategy. They'll say, "This is our strategy and this is towards our customers." And then when they start to gain a tremendous amount, especially continuous customer feedback. I'm not talking about the market research once a year or twice a year. When you're having this continuous customer feedback, you can see whether you're executing the strategy or not. Then you find a spot where there's a gap. We think we deliver whatever it might be, right? An inspiring environment or great hospitality. But, according to our customer, whatever we say is apparently just marketing blather and our customer is not feeling the same thing. So there's a gap there. I don't think it's so much trial and error as is it urgency. We have a strategy that we're trying to deploy. What's most urgent? What's the most urgent gap? We have to address that gap and as soon as you start to address that gap and dig in, at some point, it's going to take you back to how your people are sourced, hired, trained, educated, onboarded, developed.

CER: When you spoke, you gave real world examples of employees taking on responsibility. How difficult was it getting them to the level you wanted them to be?

Blair McHaney: I think it's important enough that we are investing now, and this is just in the few clubs, instead of having three hours of onboarding and about 12 hours of in-department training, it's going to expand to about 50 of training. And onboarding is going to expand greatly. When I'm saying onboarding, I just take for granted you have to do all the HR crap, right? You have to sign the papers. I'm not even talking about that. I'm talking about cultural onboarding. I'm talking about understanding why the organization exists and what its aspirations are. All of that; the cultural onboarding. I think it's equally important that all staff members have to be reboarded once a year. Because your onboarding is going to evolve. It's going to get better. It's going to get more and more aligned as your thinking gets more and more wrapped around customer experience. And then the people who were onboarded two years ago, it's a different world. And they need to be reminded.

CER: Is the reboarding the same amount of time as the onboarding?

Blair McHaney: Yes.

CER: What customer loyalty innovations would you like to see in the future?

Blair McHaney: One thing that I really want to see in the technology is to build up the operational sides of it more. In other words, tracking – when you deploy an initiative, being able to track it. Having more of a social aspect in there, where your own teams are actually interacting with each other within the system. I think so much of the loyalty innovation is going to be business model innovation and how you think about your own customers. And I think that's going to be informed a lot by your customer experience management system but I think it's so much about how you digest that information and try to innovate around that. There are all those things that I want to be able to track in the system.

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About Kimberly Warner-Cohen



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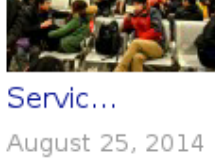
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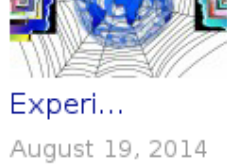
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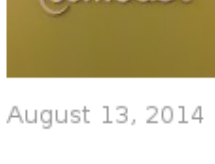
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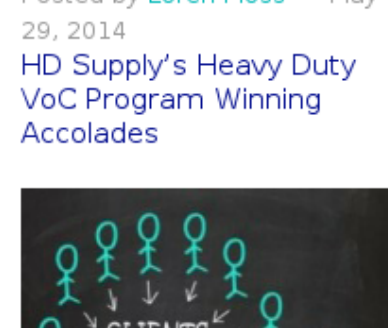
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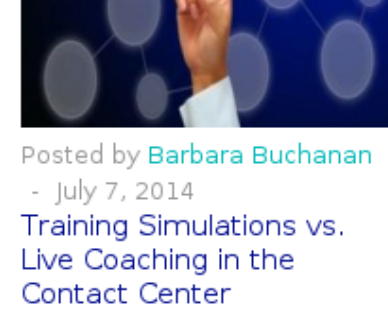
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