

CORPORATE SNAPSHOT

Cerritos Library is a municipal library in Cerritos, Calif. Recognized for its forward-thinking approach to serving the public, the library refers to itself as “the experience library of the future.” Established in 1973, the library opened a new, expanded 88,000-square-foot building in 2002 with a total collection of 250,000 items. Cerritos Library employs a staff of 100 who serve about 3,500 patrons each day. In 2003, Pine & Gilmore, at their annual thinkabout conference, named Cerritos Library the “Experience Stager of the Year.”

SITUATION

With a spectacular new facility that was sure to impress, Cerritos Library wanted to make sure that the customer experience stood out as much as the building. The library knew the first step to achieving that was getting the staff excited about their work and infusing the culture with passion and enthusiasm even before opening the doors of the new library.

OBJECTIVES

1. Make the Cerritos Library staff as big a draw as the facility itself.
2. Help employees learn to focus on the big picture versus each individual task.
3. Make the work culture fun and engaging for staff and, consequently, the customers.
4. Train the staff to be “on stage” and to “choose their attitude” at work.

FISH! APPROACH

Fascinated by the story of the fishmongers and how their attitude at work translates into a memorable customer experience, Cerritos Library knew FISH! was a natural fit for their team. The philosophy was introduced during training sessions that included the whole staff. It didn’t take long before the staff had internalized the four principles and began putting them to work. Cerritos Library continues to have a regular FISH! training session every six months, both for new employees as well as those who are interested in a “renewal of spirit.” In between these sessions, teams of people are challenged to bring different principles to life.

FRESH FISH! EXPERIENCES

Supervisor meetings are held quarterly during which participants share how they made someone’s day and conversely how someone else made their day. Cerritos employees have translated the FISH! principles into their own terminology. “Be there” has become “Romancing each other and our customers” and “make their day” has come to include “we are each others customers.” The staff has costume days during which they each wear something that reflects their personality. The staff does regular arts and crafts projects together like making Valentine’s Day cards. The library has launched its own internally developed comic strip that engages customers and creates excitement, while educating them. The project also includes an interactive website and life-size characters who meet and greet the guests. In the morning briefing, members of the staff are given a chance to talk about anything they need to before customers begin arriving. Sometimes this morning briefing even involves music and dancing to get staff motivated for the day. The library has added an outdoor café, complete with entertainers and karaoke evenings. One employee is known to belt out rap songs (his favorite – 50 Cent).

INSIDE STORIES

“I had a gentleman walk up to me one day to thank me – he said, ‘When I come into this building, all my troubles go away. I feel at ease. Everything in my life seems better.’”

-- Don Buckley, Head of Support Services

“We’re there for our customers by proactively helping them. When employees are at the desk, they spend the majority of their time standing up looking for people to help. Standing up or roaming the stacks makes them more visible and more approachable. They don’t just hide behind the desk.”

-- Don Buckley, Head of Support Services

“Sometimes it’s the small things that make our customers’ days. We have fresh flowers in our bathrooms and get a lot of praise from customers about how nice and unexpected that is.”

-- Jackie Stetson, Library Supervisor

“Our Old World area has become a place for people to read the classics, which at our library are beautiful, leather-bound copies that can’t be checked out. In the library’s old building, they were seldom used. But now we have them sitting out in a nice area with a fireplace. So our guests were coming in and saying, ‘We always wanted to read the classics, and with these high-back chairs and fireplace, it’s the perfect setting.’ So we listened to them and developed a whole classics program.”

-- Jackie Stetson, Library Supervisor

“Great customer service training doesn’t happen overnight. It requires a new way of thinking and an ongoing dedication to the customer. I love that our staff now has fun, even when dealing with difficult situations. This is the best place I’ve ever worked.”

--Waynn Pearson, Director

RESULTS

1. Steadily increasing employee satisfaction (10 – 15 percent increase).
2. Overall attitude of the organization has improved.
3. The staff gets as much customer recognition as the building.
4. In May 2004, Cerritos was selected by Reader’s Digest as the “Best American Public Library.”
5. In 2003, Cerritos Library was named the “Experience Stager of the Year” by Experience Economy authors Pine & Gilmore.
6. Since the new building opened in 2002, the library has experienced a 70 percent increase in circulation – from 600,000 to more than 1 million materials circulated per year.
7. A Godbe Research survey in 2003 showed that of all Cerritos city services, the library received the highest level of customer satisfaction.
8. Reservable space at the library is now booked every weekend for almost a year ahead of time. When the library first opened it was booked only about two weekend days per month.