



## CUSTOMER SERVICE IS EVERYONE'S JOB

*By John Randall, President & CEO, Hitachi Global Air Power*



Last Christmas, I sat with my family around the tree, unwrapping gifts and celebrating the day. When I opened a present from my wife, I found...an empty box. Inside was a photo of what my gift was supposed to be. Puzzled, I looked at her.

*"Sorry, hon. I ordered it weeks ago, but it didn't arrive in time."*

It was a small inconvenience, but still disappointing—especially for my wife, who had been excited to give me the gift. And while it was just one late package,

it got me thinking about customer service and how even minor disappointments can shape a company's reputation.

That missing gift may not have been just a shipping issue. It could have been a breakdown somewhere else in the process—manufacturing, supply chain, order processing, inventory management, or even an IT system glitch. In business, customer service isn't confined to a single department; it's the result of multiple functions working together. When one

part falters, the entire system stumbles, and the customer feels the impact. Sometimes, it's a minor frustration. Other times, it's a deal-breaker. But every disappointment leaves an impression, and too many of them add up. Before you know it, your customer experience scores drop, and trust erodes. At best, you have an unsatisfied customer. At worst—you've lost them for good.

At my company, we have been undertaking a total transformation of our business and realigning our company to becoming a truly customer-focused organization – soup to nuts. Guiding this transformation are three essential priorities: embracing change, boldly investing in technology, and empowering our employees. Each plays a role in rethinking every process, every system, and every decision, and helps us view our business through the lens of how our structure impacts our customers. As I keep telling my colleagues, everyone is in customer service.

## **Embracing Change**

Embracing the change needed to become a truly customer-centric business means ensuring every employee—regardless of department—sees their job as essential to the customer experience. Customer service isn't confined to answering calls or processing orders; it's about every decision, every process, and every function working together to create a seamless experience.

All roles, from finance and engineering to logistics and IT, play a part in ensuring reliable products, on-time delivery, and effortless service. A missed detail in a production schedule, an unclear invoice, or a delay in processing an order may seem minor internally but can create major frustrations for customers.

When employees see how their work directly contributes to customer success, they become more invested in making improvements, identifying potential issues before they escalate, and ensuring that every interaction—whether direct or indirect—leaves a positive impression.

Every team needs to take a good look at how they operate and ask the hard questions:

*Does this process help or hinder our customers' experience?*

*How can we change this process or procedure to exceed our customers' expectations?*

*Are we adapting to - or anticipating - our customers' evolving needs in a timely and thorough manner?*

*Are we making it easy for customers to do business with us?*

Challenging the old ways of doing things is not easy; the actions that reap the most benefits rarely are. True transformation requires more than just new processes—it demands a culture shift. And that shift happens when employees are engaged in the process. By involving employees in shaping the future of our company, we not only improve how we serve our customers, but we build a culture of commitment, where everyone contributes to continuously improving the customer experience.

## **(Boldly) Investing in Technology for a Better Customer Experience**

Customer expectations are changing, and technology is central to those expectations. As consumers, we rely on our phones and other digital tools to make our lives easier – why should a B2B environment be any different?

But technology alone isn't the answer—it's ensuring the technology helps to solve a real problem for our customers. If a new tool adds complexity instead of simplifying the customer experience, then we've missed the mark. Once the right solution is determined, we must be bold in its implementation. Look beyond the now and into the future. Invest in technology that anticipates your customers' needs and your investment will go farther.

## Empowering Employees to Exceed Expectations

Finally, one of the biggest barriers to great customer service is a lack of empowerment. Too often, employees want to do the right thing but are constrained by rigid policies, outdated processes, or a culture of fear for stepping outside the lines.

I recently had an issue with a household appliance that needed to be returned. I had barely missed the return window—by just a couple of hours—but the customer service rep had no flexibility to make an exception. It was frustrating for me as a customer, but also frustrating for the employee, who wanted to help but wasn't allowed to.

This is a perfect example of why empowering employees matters. If you hire people to serve your customers, trust them to make the right judgment calls. Give them the authority and tools to solve problems and give them the latitude to adjust processes that aren't working.

## Customer-Centric Nirvana

Becoming a customer-focused company isn't a slogan—it's a commitment to action. It requires every employee, in every role, to ask a question: "How does my work impact the customer?" Then, it requires that those employees be empowered to make the necessary changes to better serve the customer. It involves bold change – and a fearlessness to embrace and invest in technology.

At the end of the day, our customers don't just experience our products. They experience how we communicate, how we solve problems, how we anticipate their needs, and how easy we make it to do business with us. When we put the customer at the center of every decision, in every department, we don't just strengthen our business—we help our customers strengthen theirs. And hopefully, your customer will never again open an empty box – Christmas gift or otherwise.