Some Customer Service at Delta Airlines & Calgary Airport

written by Manoj Khanna | December 24, 2009



While flying anywhere the most important thing to anyone is the customer service. And that is the moral of my short story which I am sharing here. Since I have a lot of time to burn and do not have anything better to do on a Christmas Eve except sitting at the airport killing time and writing this for general public knowledge.

So I am flying to my destination X, and charting the flight from Calgary. I reach 1 hr 15 mins prior to my departure time at the check-in counter of Delta, and find that the kiosk says "Flight is closed". So I ask gently the check-in concierge about checking in – and the first response "Sir, you have missed your flight". What!?? WTF??? Missed my %@&%#&# flight?!?!?!? And that's the only response I get from that person, and there's no try for help from her side (you'd imagine that if all computers are on the same network then how freaking difficult it is to print one boarding pass!??) – rather I get a mean responsive grin with this-dude-missed-his-flight attitude and hey-I-made-him-miss-his-flight-sucker win giggle. Am I surprised? Am I shocked? Am I pissed? Am I about to tell her – if-I-was-your-boss-you'd-already-be-fired-message.

You bet! All in a same breath.

So I request, and again I request, and again as a gentle customer I ask her in a polite way – you-must-not-be-serious-just-please-print-my-boarding-pass or something like that. But instead I'm handed over Delta's customer service number. Not getting too annoyed or lack for a better term ANGRY, I quietly step away from the counter and call Delta customer service. I call into three different reps, and spend on average 20 mins with each of them to find out my options. One rep wasn't even trying to search through what's available and suggested that I should look for a ticket in January 2010. You're serious!! To my shock and applaud-in-disgust and the-most-daunting-frustration-of-the-year she was literary telling me that I should cancel my vacation and now plan something in 2010. Wow! How encouraging – and apparently everyone within North America was flying Delta and no other possible options were available anyway. And one rep even accused me that I was calling her a liar and she hung up on me. So if you are telling me NO for every word (within in few seconds) I am asking you, then should I expect that you are doing every possible search within in your system in microseconds!!! Wow – Delta must be running some great super computing power machines within there data centers.

So I take my chances, and call the fourth time and this time I explain that rep loud and clear that what has happened in past hour, and how I expect him to resolute my situation. I want no BS and no games, and I want him to book me on the next flight out of Calgary so I don't miss my connecting flight to my final destination. After spending whopping 47 mins, the 4th rep comes back to me with a possible solution where I've to shell out $Z in order to make that happen. So I take that option because I am desperate, and there's no other cheaper option available.

Now, if that counter-lady was little-well educated in customer service by Delta personnel, was solution oriented and pro-customer-friendly and had some embedded courtesy and

politeness through company culture then this plethora of frustration, haggling and name-calling wouldn't have had happened. But it did happen, and it did say a lot about the company and its culture weaved through its employees. It's a pathetic situation for a customer facing company, and it's shameful for people who inoculate and breed that culture.

Also, this will teach me a lesson to be at the check-in before two hours, or better yet do online check-in. But that's no excuse for all the customer service at Delta which needs to be desperately fixed and taken care of. I hope they hire right set of people to bring betterment and improvement in their customer service.

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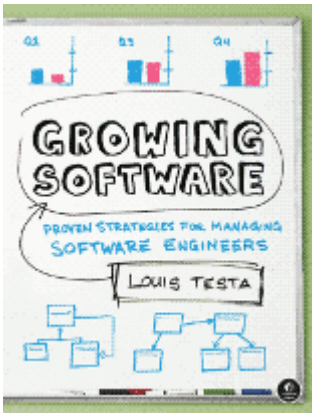
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Book Review: Growing Software

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A little while ago I was contacted by No Starch Press and was asked whether I would be interested in reviewing a new book on IT management – Growing Software – Proven Strategies for Managing Software Engineers by Louis Testa. And since the topic was interesting enough for me to read through, I decided to give it a read and a feedback. So here it is.

First off, these are all my own personal opinions and observations about the book. I like the fact that the book is very well organized. It starts off with the understanding that a manager needs to first understand its development team, without the team there is no game that can be played. Then it dives into the tangibility and viability of that game for which everyone is working towards, that is the software product. Then it details on how to deal with the organizational framework typically the management above the manager. And then finally the processes and the working relationship of various objectives within a product development. The section about looking into the future is a classical example which most authors end up having, but as far as the life-cycle goes the changes today are so evident and quick that it becomes almost obsolete to have this into the book itself. I find that certain topics from this last section could have been easily absorbed in earlier parts of the book.

The “Additional reading” section at the end of each chapter is somewhat helpful, and adds to a very interesting reading list – that is if you have enough time to read and research. Short stories, live examples and trivia’s shared throughout also add

to a reader’s reading excitement.

As far as the imparted knowledge on understanding the team and management within the book is concerned, in my opinion, the author’s thoughts are limited with his experience. In a generic sense, it would have been more valuable to focus on the management of engineers rather than making engineers learn about the management. That I believe was not the subject of the book. It is a simple oversight.

Providing a detailed description on product management is a nice addition to the book, which typically is not found in depth and detail in other books with similar subject matter. Good coverage is provided for the “Release Management” chapter.

I find a little too less emphasis on the collaborative framework, and for the teams working in an agile environment. Engaging the customer, and executives through that approach is somewhat an overlook in the “Outside of Engineering” chapter. Although, the author talks about the customer satisfaction, meetings, closing the deal (not necessarily for IT teams if your end client is not a purchasing customer), and support etc. but they seem to be too far and wide to be able to precept the product for collaborative product development.

The processes section is long, and has far more traditional approaches to manage a software team. Author suggests data collection throughout the various stages of the project, which is very normal, but doesn’t reflect in-depth as to using what tools today will make a difference and how those tools can be helpful and effective in managing an engineering team. Review of existing software development processes such as waterfall, iterative, spiral, agile, etc. is not very in-depth. And everyone knows about the importance of quality assurance, and for someone who’s novice in this side of the world then this chapter might be really helpful to them.

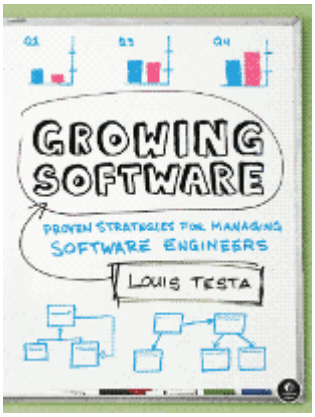
“Planning the future” section, the last section, is a small addition which I think the author decided to add at the very end of his book writing. As I said earlier that some of these chapters are already covered in the previous sections or should have been covered under those sections. But this section offers an interesting insight into author’s perspective in setting the direction, which is a very small interesting read.

Overall, if you are a project lead or development lead for a small group or a small software firm then this would be an interesting read for you. You might take away some really applicable learning examples and possibly be able to map out some of the processes mentioned within the book.

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Digital Books Vs. Traditional Printed Books

written by Manoj Khanna | December 24, 2009

While running this morning I switched to NPR and heard a very interesting argument about the life of books beyond the print medium that is in the form of eBooks, Kindle, Sony Reader, iTouch or iPhone format. I am not surprised by the growing trend in electronics and the expanding availability of various media in trendy formats. Though the review was about the latest Kindle from Amazon, and since I live way up north that device has not made its mark in snow country yet. But I care less, as I use my mighty iPhone and 2005 PowerBookG4 to do all my digital reading. Not sure if Kindle is something I'd want or for that matter any eBook reader. While companies do these crazy innovations and spent tonnes loads of money into they forget the customers convenience and affordability. Why would someone in sane mind buy a $250+ device, when they can download less than $10 worth of eBook app on their already invested $300 iPhone? It is beyond my reach to argue that, and more importantly mere waste of time to even talk about it any further than this. Enough said.

Now, the human life as we know is evolving and will continue to evolve around the industrialization of its race. It has been a growing trend past 200 years, and the next few hundred years are not going to be any different in sophistication and astonishment that will continue to awe the older generation over new ones.

Coming back to books, I agree with the thought that I aspire an actual printed book over the electronic format or an audio book. But when it comes to convenience, it is no argument that the ease of carrying 100+ title in the palm of your hands is more convenient than carrying a trunk load of printed books. In fast paced organic life today, convenience and comfort play

a very strong hand. Keeping all the drama out of normal day routine, the accessibility to information is such a winning factor. Imagine searching for a selected phrase in a printed book of 300+ pages, and worst still you don't even remember which book. Now imagine, that with e-version. Life is easy with bits and bytes, ain't it!

For the record, I still love listening to my collections of EPs and LPs in my spare time over the trendy iTouch/iPhone, though I can't live without my iPhone. Such an "Hippocratic" statement, but, true.

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7 Must Read Productivity Steps to Finally Getting Things Done

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7 Must Read Productivity Steps to Finally Getting Things Done

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