

“We are in the customer service business. We just happen to sell shoes.” That’s a paraphrased quote from Tony Hsieh, the CEO of Zappos, which was sold recently to Amazon for \$850 million. Tony has the right idea!

We all enjoy great customer service. I remember a few years ago, my air conditioner went out at my house. It was the standard “hottest day of the year,” which is when all air conditioners seem to go out. The service company I hired said they would have it back up by the end of the week. They ran into unforeseen problems and needed a specific part which they didn’t have in stock. This was a Friday. They could have said that they would send for it and I would have cool air back after the weekend, but they didn’t. The company made a promise that it would be back on. So, they sent someone to Wichita to get the part for my AC and he drove it back that night, all at no extra cost to me. The guys came out first thing Saturday morning and installed the part. That’s great customer service! I have never forgotten that extra effort – so now I always call them first.

The College has enjoyed some wonderful service from some providers and we use those folks over and over again. They meet and exceed our expectations on a routine basis. Other providers have let us down, making us miss important deadlines and costing the College, and thereby the taxpayers, more than it should. Those folks we don’t use again.

I’m sure you could tell similar stories about how someone bent over backwards to help you have a great experience. I have had wonderful service from many businesses in our communities – people who took the extra time to make sure I was satisfied and happy.

But what about the service the College provides to its constituencies?

As President, I get a lot of polarized feedback from our students and community members. I have received some wonderful messages from students and community members telling me how grateful they were about the service they received from our employees or a particular department – faculty that helped a student succeed, coaches that changed someone’s life, staff members that were courteous and helpful. As you might have guessed, I also get those other comments when things were not so ideal and they might not have received the best service possible.

Great customer service is as much about the culture of a business or institution as it is about the service it provides. The Board of Trustees has given me the goal of improving customer service at the College, a goal that the employees and I have been moving forward every day.

We want students to have a positive, smooth experience as they process through the bureaucratic system to get admitted, advised, enrolled, and get their financial aid.

(Just a note here on the bureaucracy required: If you think we like collecting and managing all those pieces of information, you’re crazy. The state and national government likes to have all of its data its way. And its hunger for data grows every year.)

NCCC has set itself to improve all of its processes and procedures to make the needed bureaucracy as painless as possible. We are growing rapidly, up over 10% this year alone. We

must rethink how we handle what has grown to over 3,700 students a year. It's a great problem to have!

I have asked everyone to look at how they process students and find ways to improve. If the process involves a paper printout, a ruler and a highlighter I'll bet there is a way to make that go faster with fewer errors. We must embrace the powerful tools at our disposal and adapt from the 19th century technology of paper files and carbon copy NCR forms.

Staff members have been going through service training this year. We have created new ways for people to give us suggestions on improvements (look for the "Improve NCCC" button at the bottom of our homepage). Employees are looking at how they communicate with students to make sure folks get timely feedback. I have created the service awards where anyone, including you, can nominate one of our employees for a service award. You'll find that button on the bottom of our website as well. We are adding new personnel in areas to help with the growth.

Maybe you have been the recipient of excellent or perhaps poor service from our staff. I hope it was the former and not the latter! We will continue the journey to become the premier community college in Kansas in every way, including how it works with you through the service we provide. We are trying to be in the customer service business, but just happen to be a college.

One last thing! If you have a moment, go on the President's page at www.neosho.edu (click the picture of me on the home page). We are considering updating the look of the panther logo and I'd like your opinion of some basic designs. There is a very quick survey and some prospective logos. Have a look and let me know what you think.

As always, I welcome your questions and comments at binbody@neosho.edu.