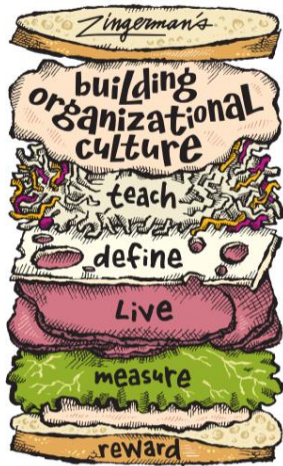


Zingerman’s The Art of Giving Great Service

[According to its website](#), Zingerman’s Delicatessen opened in March 1982 in a historic building near the Ann Arbor (Michigan) Farmers Market. The Deli was founded by Paul Saginaw and Ari Weinzweig, two friends who dreamt of creating a traditional Jewish deli that would bring very special foods to Ann Arbor in a way that was unique to them.

ZingTrain began in 1994, with the goal of providing internal courses, training, and seminars to its employees. Eventually, ZingTrain branched out to provide external courses, workshops, and seminars. ZingTrain is part of Zingerman’s Community of Businesses (ZCob), ten unique businesses with over 700 employees based in Ann Arbor. Over the course of 40 years in business, Zingerman’s has been recognized nationally for its exceptional products, customer service, and its unique business model.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF GREAT SERVICE



On April 25-26, I attended a two-day seminar through ZingTrain called “The Art of Giving Great Service.” There were 11 in attendance, so we were able to get to know one another. Among the attendees was a team from Culver’s and a librarian from East Lansing. We had two trainers named Joanie and Jenni, both who had once worked at one of Zingerman’s businesses. Both were attentive, great facilitators and excellent trainers. ZingTrain is a custom-designed training facility on the south side of Ann Arbor, near Zingerman’s Bakehouse, Candy Manufactory, Creamery and Coffee Company. After the training, I was able to visit the delicatessen and observe some of the ideas discussed in the seminar.

The two days consisted of lectures, role playing, discussion, reflection, and time to work on action plans. The following are some of the overall ideas and themes that had an impact on me:

Service Culture

Zingerman’s has 5 Steps to Building a Culture of Great Service: *Teach it, Define it, Live it, Measure it and Reward it*. Joanie and Jenni discussed the *5-90-5 Rule*, the idea that 5% of the population will never excel at providing great service, and for another 5%, providing great service comes naturally. Most people (90%) fall somewhere else in this bell curve. Zingerman’s believes that giving great service is teachable and can be improved. Asking for help from your managers and colleagues is a sign of strength. They asked us to do an organizational service culture assessment, asking us questions such as, *Feedback from customers is actively solicited and documented*. Zingerman’s believes that what we do within our organizations has a direct correlation with how we treat our customers. They reward their employees

when great service is provided by giving service awards and featuring stories in their company newsletter.

We spent some time talking about the power of language. Instead of asking a customer *Can I help you or may I help you?*, they suggested asking open-ended questions such as *What can I help you find today?* Asking a yes or no question usually results in responses such as *no* or *I'm just looking*.



We also discussed phrases that have a calming affect:

- *Please tell me what happened.*
- *I'm here to help you.*
- *We'll make it right.*
- *I'm so embarrassed that we did that.*

After the seminar, I had a chance to visit the Delicatessen, where I could see these ideas in action. The Deli is popular and located in a historic area of Ann Arbor. There were signs explaining how long the wait would be for a sandwich, and several employees asked if I needed help. The deli had an upbeat, positive attitude. I also had a chance to visit the coffee company, creamery, and bakehouse, and the experience was the same.

Steps for Great Service

Zingerman's focuses on three steps for giving great service:

- Figure out what the customer wants
 - Ask the customer, what can I provide?
 - The 10/4 rule: acknowledge a customer within 10 feet and greet them within 4 feet.
 - Engage the customer for as much time as it takes.
- Get it for them:
 - Be polite and respectful. Use "thank you" and "you're welcome."
- Go the extra mile:
 - This is not always about providing a freebie or about something financial. It can mean providing an action or an extra step.

Measuring Great Service

How does an organization know if they are providing great service if they are not measuring it?

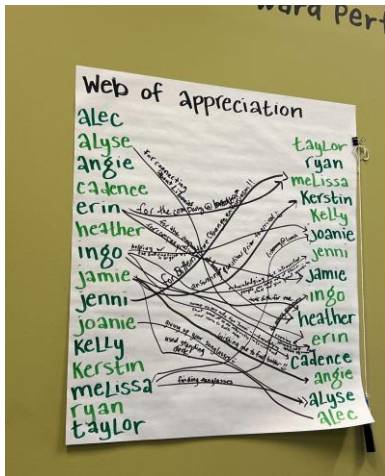
Zingerman's developed a system for capturing complaints, suggestions, requests, and compliments, because all feedback matters. Small ideas or suggestions could turn into permanent improvements.

Several years ago, "Code Red" and "Code Green" forms were developed. Code Red forms are used for complaints or suggestions, covering a guest temperature scale and the actions the employee took to make the situation right for the guest. Code Green forms are used to record compliments, asking what

the customer liked and who should be recognized. All forms are recorded and analyzed frequently. Joanie said at first it took some time to get all the staff to start using these forms. The participant guide also shared examples of how other businesses have adapted these forms. Not only is using these forms impactful for measuring great customer service, but they can also be used for succession planning as new staff leave or are hired.

Leading by Example

Zingerman’s employees practice what they preach, and this was evident over the two days of the seminar. Here are some examples:



- Web of Appreciation
 - This is one example of how employees can show appreciation for one another. It was illustrated during the seminar. One person can draw a line to another person with a compliment. Eventually, a “web of appreciation is formed.”
- Soda
 - After the first day of the seminar, we were asked to take a short evaluation about the day, so Joanie and Jenni could get a temperature check of the group and make changes for Day 2, if needed. Someone had commented that having soda as a beverage option at lunch would’ve been beneficial from a caffeine standpoint. That evening, Joanie and Jenni went around the office and searched in their staff refrigerator for soda. Their feeling was, if we can find a way to provide this, we will.
- Cough Drops/Location
 - I had developed a bad cough during the seminar and had to excuse myself a few times on Day 1, so I wouldn’t be disruptive. Upon arriving in the room on Day 2, I noticed a small bowl of cough drops at my place setting. I was also seated close to the door. Joanie and Jenni reiterated that it was fine for me to excuse myself when I needed to.
- Bread and Code Red
 - Upon completion of the seminar, all participants received a gift bag, which included a large loaf of bread from the Bakehouse. Because I only had a carry-on suitcase that was already full, I knew that I wouldn’t be able to take the bread home with me. (I ended up giving it to a guest from Florida who was staying at the same hotel).

Knowing that Zingerman’s employees seek feedback and go the extra mile, I contacted Joanie and Jenni after the training and said, *while the gift bag was wonderful and generous, the loaf of bread might not be practical for those of us who travel by air and have a full suitcase. :)* I explained how I gave mine away and maybe a smaller treat from the Bakehouse could be a better option. Maybe participants could be asked about what they prefer? Joanie responded: *Hello, Jamie! Thank you for this feedback - what a great*

suggestion to ask about the bread. I appreciate you bringing it up and I will write up a Code Red with the feedback. :)

While I wanted to gather ideas in customer service, I also took away some ideas from a professional development standpoint. The following things at the seminar were done well:

- Length: Because the seminar was over two days, there was plenty of time for discussions and questions.
- Participant Guide: The guide we received was detailed and offered supplemental handouts that can be easily shared. Powerpoint/screen was not used.
- Tag-Team Approach: Having two people lead us and use a tag-team approach kept the day interesting and not from getting too stale.
- Environment: The room had an intimate feel and plenty of space for us to move around. In the back, there was a standing desk. There was a rack of blankets in case any of us were cold. There were constant refreshments (tea, coffee, water) in which we could help ourselves. Joanie and Jenni made it clear at the beginning that we should move around and do what we need to feel comfortable during the seminar. The walls were covered in photos, sayings, and expressions.
- MEG: On the wall in the seminar room was a character named MEG (Mental Eyeroll Girl). MEG is there to remind participants that we will likely not agree with everything shared, or that all ideas might not be practical for us. Instead of eye rolling and checking out, MEG reminds us to “check in.” Ask for clarification, make a suggestion and take responsibility for the effectiveness of the seminar.



The following are actions that I plan to implement because of this seminar:

- Develop an onboarding customer service training program at WVLS.
- Incorporate a WVLS version of Code Red/Code Green.
- Add ideas to presentations that are currently scheduled:
 - Webinar for the Southwest Wisconsin Library System on Wednesday, June 12.
 - Develop a recorded webinar for all WVLS/NWLS libraries, developed in Summer 2024.
 - All-staff presentation for the Brown County Public Library in Green Bay on Thursday, September 26.
 - All-staff presentation for T.B. Scott Free Library in Merrill on Monday, October 14.

The seminar was excellent. It was interesting to compare the information received at the Disney Institute that I attended in February. I noticed a lot of themes overlapped!

Thank you, WVLS, for this amazing opportunity!