

# At Your Service

**AFTER A SUCCESSFUL SPELL WHICH HAS SEEN PHENOMENAL GROWTH OF THE SERVICING AND MAINTENANCE BUSINESS AT LONDON SWIMMING POOL COMPANY (LSPC), JIM MOSS, THE OUTGOING HEAD OF SERVICING & REFURBISHMENT, GIVES HIS THOUGHTS ON SERVICE EXCELLENCE AND GOING THE EXTRA MILE TO ENSURE HAPPY CLIENTS**

**W**e know that great customer service converts into more patronage, but do we go far enough to make sure that clients are delighted by every engagement with our companies?

Handing over the reins of Head of Servicing & Refurbishment to my successor at LSPC (I'm returning to the USA) got me thinking about how well the UK industry serves the end-user. In my view there are still a few hurdles to jump if we want to make sure that the customer is king and simultaneously generate more business.

This industry needs to overcome both structural and psychological barriers that prevent service excellence, which in turn holds back company performance and growth. By structural barriers I mean the rigidity of the supply chain, where products are not readily available. For example, if the solution to a client's pool problem is a replacement pump, there can be quite a time lag between order and delivery of the item, resulting in pool downtime and a disgruntled client. The LSPC ethos is that we simply will not wait for a part if it means an unhappy client! We will find a way of getting a part for the client that day, even if it means making an 80 mile round trip to collect it.

True customer service is giving clients what they want quickly; and clients are willing to pay for great service. Providing excellent service is not always easy as most clients have little pool knowledge and need to be educated on what is and isn't possible. They also need to have their expectations managed without crushing their dream. Whether it's a pool build/refurbishment or a servicing/maintenance issue, we must listen carefully to clients' aspirations and think "how can we make this happen" in a way that is practical and affordable (even high networth individuals are canny with their money) and profitable for the business? No matter how complex a client's aspiration, we need to



embrace them, whilst also advising them on the realities of construction. We must deliver their dream, not turn it into a nightmare so honesty is essential.

Listening sounds simple, but misinterpreting what the client wants from a pool or the urgency of a service call is quite common in my experience. Even after 25 years of designing, building and servicing pools in America and here in the UK for the last two and half years, I regularly encounter prospective clients who sigh with relief when they learn they don't have to wait days for an engineer to visit and even longer to get a problem fixed.

Every client thinks their pool problem is a calamity, no matter how small the issue, so it's up to us to reassure them and resolve problems fast. Our clients expect their pools to be 100% useable 100% of the time. If a client can't use their outdoor pool for a few days when the sun's shining, that's

a big deal. Our clients in central London have come to expect same day service. Responding faster has been a key strategy and this has contributed to 85% growth in servicing and maintenance business, with significant profits.

Like most pool companies, we used to accept that we had to wait for supplies but today we do whatever it takes to get the parts quickly – building strong relationships with suppliers has been essential, benefitting both parties.

I worked with the management to build a team that is 100% focused on the quality of customer service. Engineers go out of their way to get what's needed for a job. Now we respond to calls and deal with problems within 24 hours. Before signing off at the end of the day, each engineer calls into the office to find out if a colleague needs assistance and, if so, lends assistance. This way we solve all problems within our target timeframe.

This service ethos was ingrained in me in the USA, where I ran my company, Hop Cassidy Pools. A strong service ethos is wired into the American psyche, plus the pool supply chain there is highly flexible. I came to LSPC with a vision of embedding a 'can do' attitude into the team and by doing so we have enhanced service and improved response times immensely. This team spirit stems from a focus on attention to detail and a commitment to do the job right first time. By changing our attitude, we have overcome psychological and structural barriers to delivering outstanding service. I believe that any company with the right attitude can grow their business by focusing on service quality.

My time in the UK working to develop the servicing side of LSPC has been a valuable experience, which I wouldn't have missed for anything. I leave a highly structured, confident and knowledgeable team carrying on with the strong service ethos we have built together. **SPN**

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