

CEO's Executive Dinner launched

CEO Communications held its inaugural CEO Executive Dinner in the second half of this year, with the aim of getting a limited number of senior executives to participate in a round table discussion.

The five star dinner, held at The Westcliffe Hotel, Johannesburg, had the theme: 'Customer Retention in an Economic Downturn'; and guests in attendance were Andrew Boden, ER24 CEO; Dudley Miller of Schneider Electric; Glen Mollink, Innovation Group CEO; Bonang Mohale, Shell South Africa Country Chairman and Vice President; Langa Dube, Neotel Head of IT; Kobus van der Westhuizen, Aegis Senior Vice President; Anton du Plessis, Aegis; Jene Palmer, Spescom CEO; and Annelize Wepener, CEO Communications Chief Executive.

The facilitator, UK-based Guy Tweedale, who was brought over by Dinner sponsors, Spescom, introduced the topic and said the guests should take it from the angle of 'where we are in the economy today and what it means to our relationships with customers' which, of course, tied in well with the main theme.

It was pointed out that the conversation would, by nature, be erratic with no planned agenda (it was a dinner, after all). It was hoped that everyone, especially as guests represented a variety of industries across different sectors, would be able to leave the dinner with something of value, something that may assist them (in any way) within their organisations, now or in the future.

It was inevitable that one of the most discussed points following on from the topic, and seemed to last throughout the evening, was that of service and service delivery, followed closely – and intertwined even, at various stages – the recession or economic downturn. The two are, especially during a recession, inexorably linked. Quite simply, this is because customers (companies) and consumers will, with limited budgets, spend only where they feel they will get the requisite service.

Points to ponder

A few of the conversation points considered were:

- When considering the type of service offering you

have, one must take into account that experience also relates to quality. One needs experienced personnel on board to follow certain actions through.

- If a company's brand becomes associated in any way with non-delivery of any nature – the repercussions or consequences can be severe.
- Competition plays a role inasmuch as targeted markets now have more alternatives and a broader selection to choose from.
- Over-expectation on the customer's side, derived from promises made by a sales person to 'clinch' a deal, could lead to lack of trust as far as service delivery is concerned.
- Companies need to ensure their employees are 'happy' where possible. This will affect the way they deal with customers and make a long-term difference.
- Share your positivity with your staff, the aim is for the long-term difference mentioned above.
- Rewarding 'good' clients in a way that is suitable to both parties without compromising anything firms up good relationships.
- When looking for new business, don't pick up a 'last minute' order. If other companies have turned the potential client away, there must be a problem of some kind. Ensure you have sufficient time to supply the service required.

"These are only eight of the many points discussed over the course of the evening," comments CEO Communications Chief Executive Annelize Wepener. "There were many more, and most were varied. Most interesting to see was the way different industries felt about the same things affecting them differently."

At the end of the evening, guests departed with not only full stomachs, but with a head full of 'food for thought'.

Until the next one then. □

