While customer service can take on many forms, Leon Gorman, chairman of the board at L.L. Bean, may have described it best as a “darri- dar-out, ongoing, never-ending, unmitting, persevering, compassionate type of activity.” We caught up with Hankamer School of Business alumni who demonstrate an unwavering commitment to customers through the retail, health care, telecom and entertainment industries. From Jaren Shaw’s perspective, working in customer service is not something a person becomes interested in, rather, “it’s just who you are.” And having a servant’s heart is part of who you are.

Originally from Ardmore, Okla., Shaw broke the multi-generational family mold of being a University of Oklahoma Sooners by attending Baylor. “There was never a question of which college I would attend until my junior year in high school when I came home and told my parents I wanted to go to Baylor,” she said. “I truly believed, even at that young age, that Baylor’s reputation, quality of education and smaller class size would be the best environment for me to grow personally and spiritually. Indeed it was!” Upon graduating from Baylor, Shaw began her career with H-E-B, one of the nation’s largest independent-owned food retailers. However, H-E-B began as a small, family-owned grocery store, and ironically, Shaw shares a similar story. “I grew up in a small grocery store that my grandfather owned and stuck through many of my growing years’ working,” she said. “What I did not realize at the time was that retail and people were my passion. Serving others inside and outside of our store was just what we did.”

At H-E-B, Shaw started as a management trainee and spent nine years working in the stores, learning the business from the ground up and progressing to store leadership. She later held various roles in training and development, served as the director of sales and was then selected to join H-E-B’s Customer Service efforts, which she has led since July 2006. “My official duties include providing the strategy and design for H-E-B’s Customer Service and Central Checkout efforts,” she said. “I see myself as the advocate for all H-E-B customers and store Partners.”

Shaw also takes pride in her unofficial duties, mentoring someone else a day with an unexpected act of kindness, which she and H-E-B Partners refer to as “paying it forward.” “I once encountered a customer who seemed very unhappy, and I asked her what the problem was in an effort to help,” she said. “The woman shared concerns not about our store but about some very troubling things occurring in her life, and I was touched. I handed her a beautiful flower arrangement and told her I felt like she needed a little sunshine. She started to cry, and I did too. It’s a hard world, but if I can make it just a tiny bit better for one person, what a great day it has been.”

Never missing a dull moment, Shaw also manages the challenges that come with raising service efforts for generations of H-E-B customers and Partners in an increasingly technological world. “I believe the definition of customer service is changing,” she said. “How do we relate with it in order to serve everyone? Today, customers have so many retail options. How do you differentiate your brand as you customers drive by the others to come see you based on the relationship you have built with them over time?”

Shaw’s dedication to exceptional customer service is a true reflection of H-E-B’s tagline: “Where Everybody’s Welcome.” Although her work is never done, Shaw strives each day to serve others using a mix of determination, urgency, anxiety and compassion. “I truly believe I have the best job in the world because it is the right job for me,” she said. “In H-E-B land, we serve over 7 million customers each week with 76,000 Partners; that’s a lot of opportunity to serve. My true passion is serving our customers, Partners and communities. It’s just who I am.”

Jaren Shaw, BBA ‘15
Vice President, Customer Service, H-E-B
San Antonio, Texas
It’s not every day you see Elvis on the way to work, but for Adam Bravo, it’s not that unusual.

“You really never know who you’re going to see in Las Vegas,” he said. “I’ve seen it all—from Elvis impersonators to sports stars and Hollywood celebrities.”

Bravo currently serves as the director of campaign operations for MGM Resorts International, which owns an assortment of properties on the Las Vegas Strip—from the AAA Five Diamond rated, luxurious Bellagio to the newest offering, ARIA Resort and Casino.

On his journey to working for the second most profitable gaming company in the world, Bravo graduated from Baylor in 2002 and then spent some time in Europe, which included a stint in Greece working in the travel industry. “I thought I would put my degree in International Business to good use by making a living traveling through Europe,” he laughed. “That lasted about a year.”

Back in the U.S., Bravo gained experience in retail marketing and business development, moved to Las Vegas and began working for MGM Resorts International in 2006. He has since handled all of the direct marketing from a corporate standpoint and reach millions of customers using database marketing.

“Our biggest channel right now is email marketing, we send about 60 million email each month,” he said. “We manage the marketing process for events, shows or concerts from beginning to end, which include developing and implementing a creative concept, targeting customers, and making sure they attend the event and have an enjoyable experience. Every weekend is something new, whether it’s promoting The Eagles concert at the MGM Grand or the Michael Jackson, Cirque du Soleil show at Mandalay Bay.”

Bravo also said his role is a natural fit due to his analytical nature.

“So much of marketing now is based on collected data,” he said. “The more information we have about our customers, the more effective we can be with our marketing strategies. I’m an analytical, data-driven person, and most of our marketing is driven by statistics and analytics. It’s a lot easier to make big decisions based on solid numbers.”

Bravo and his team recently played a key role in implementing the company’s decision to enhance its existing loyalty program, now called “M Life.” A decade ago, casino activity was the main revenue stream in Las Vegas, but Bravo said profits have shifted to more than 60% of the Gross Gaming Revenue generated from non-gaming entities, such as hotels, restaurants, shows and high-end shopping.

“It’s been a big transition within the industry, and we’ve worked hard to diversify our offerings,” Bravo said. “M Life rewards customers if they play a slot machine at the Ritual, stay at MGM Grand, or see one of our shows at The Mirage. With this program, we learn more about our customers and are able to offer rewards based on their entire Las Vegas experience. It’s the right thing to do for our customers and the best way to reward them.”

Bravo cites a variety of customers both domestic and international, and he credits Baylor faculty members for preparing him for the challenge.

“My job is dependent upon the ability to transcend cultures and get to know my customers, and some of my international business courses helped prepare me for that,” he said. “Many professors at Barton and in business school learned about business concepts. They spoke from a knowledge base and not from a book. Looking back now, it gave me such a better understanding of how business works.”

The odds may not always be in your favor in Las Vegas, but Bravo said one thing is a sure bet in life: change.

“In 2005, very few people thought we would be in the economic situation we faced in 2007,” he said. “I think it caused a lot of people to reevaluate how they did business. No matter what curve you choose, you have to be ready for change within yourself and within an industry and be willing to accept that change.”
A hospital may not be the first place that comes to mind when you think of customer service; however, due to the dynamic nature of the health care industry and patient expectations, hospitals are quickly climing to the top of the list. And Justin Rock is part of the movement to provide patients the most efficient and effective service possible.

After completing his undergraduate degree in Economics in just three years at The University of Texas at Arlington (graduating magna cum laude), Rock entered Baylor’s Robin’s MBA Healthcare Program.

“The primary reason I chose Baylor was because of its unique health care offerings,” he said. “Baylor has an extremely strong reputation in the health care community, both on the medical and business side.”

To provide students with an-depth training experience, the Robin’s MBA Healthcare Program requires a paid executive residency with a health care organization. Rock traveled south to Valley Baptist Health System in Harlingen, Texas, in June 2009 where his residency project centered on the creation of a Customer Service Department.

“Prior to the residency, Valley Baptist had lost sight of its customer service values,” Rock said. “The executive staff saw this as a major competitive disadvantage and decided to create the Customer Service Department to address our immediate strategic needs. Since then, customer service has become a major pillar of our organization and is now part of our daily vernacular.”

Upon completion of his residency and earning an MBA, with a specialization in health care administration, Rock was hired as customer service manager at Valley Baptist and began working closely with medical leadership, operational directors and physicians on how best to address customer service needs.

“My work ranged from generating daily reports on current patient satisfaction statistics to creating far-reaching operational strategies, such as the implementation of more timely rounds,” he said. “At least once a month, I would spend a full day on each hospital campus visiting with front line employees and patients. This allowed me to see the direct result of our hospital’s initiatives and provide us an opportunity to receive immediate feedback from employees on daily perception of the organization.”

In 2011, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) initiated the Hospital Value-Based Purchasing Program, where acute care hospitals across the nation will be reimbursed based on their performance on certain quality measures, such as patient satisfaction. Rock said health care organizations are still learning exactly how to incorporate customer service into their overall strategies and quickly adapt to those policy changes, which will take effect in 2012.

“Improving customer service is still a fairly new concept to the health care industry, and many hospital administrators are still figuring out how to react to the CMS-required public reporting of patient satisfaction data,” he said. “However, recent studies have shown that improvements in customer service, such as increased communication between nurses, physicians and patients, not only lead to increased treatment plan compliance and improved outcomes, but will also have a direct financial impact on the hospital in terms of increased patient loyalty and additional reimbursement through the CMS Value-Based Purchasing guidelines.”

Now an operations analyst, Rock continues to advocate efficient health care from an operational standpoint, such as lowering emergency room wait times. As customer service within the health care industry grows increasingly important, Rock’s ultimate goal is to ensure quality care.

“During my residency, I was actually a little hesitant to work in customer service,” he said. “So much of business school concentrates on understanding analytics that we sometimes forget the end purpose of our work. To quote our vice president of Patient Services, ‘People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.’”