

**Easy to follow and apply information
that anyone can use to ...
Become a Customer Service Superstar**



Foreword

We hope you enjoy and benefit from this enlightening customer service training guide that was written by a Customer Service industry professional with over 26 years experience. Learning and applying proper Customer Service techniques will increase your job performance, lower your stress levels and raise customer satisfaction ratings to new heights.

Please read the contents of the book carefully and then take advantage of the free Bonus Customer service skills exam that will test your retention of this important information. You will find a link to the free online Customer Service skills assessment test on the last page of this book.

You are welcome and encouraged to share a link to this book with friends, family and associates that could benefit from increasing their Customer Service Skills.

To find and register for upcoming customer service training seminars and thousands of other training seminars of all types in the U.S. and Canada click the link at the bottom of any page or visit findaseminar.com.

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Customer Service Excellence – Learn how to provide outstanding customer service

There is a common thread among all thriving companies: they know how to treat their customers. Successful businesses understand that service, and not just price, is important to consumers, so they don't have to give away the ranch to get business or please customers. They know the old adage "The customer is always right" is not a hard and fast rule, but at the same time they know that you should treat each and every customer with respect at all times, as well as keep an open mind and be sensitive to their needs.

In today's competitive business world companies continue to search for ways to increase sales and profits. Many times customer service gets lost in that quest. Reductions in staff and modifications in company policies often limit the customer service representatives' ability to render the quality of customer service that customers require and deserve. In extreme cases, at companies who truly don't understand the value of customer service, live customer support may be discontinued all together leaving frustrated customers the sole option of leaving voice mail and waiting for a company representative to return their call. Either of the above actions are usually a recipe for disaster causing the company to suffer huge losses and of course reverse their newly implemented policies or rebuild their customer service group with new people a fact that ultimately hurts the customer as new staff gets up to speed on the company products and services.

Whether you are working with company imposed policies or staffing limitations, whether you are new to a customer service position or you just want to improve your customer service skills and become that Customer Service Representative extraordinaire, there are several tips you can put into practice immediately to provide top-notch customer service.

Let's start with a few things to do and a few NOT to do:

First and foremost to providing excellent customer service is to **LISTEN** – whether it takes 10 seconds or 10 minutes. Let the customer talk so you can adequately take in and understand what they are saying. There is nothing more frustrating to a customer than explaining why they are calling only to have the customer service representative give a response that has nothing to do with what they are calling about.

L – Let
I – Information
S – Seep
T – Through
E – Every
N - Nerve

Ask only relevant questions – get to the underlying issue so you can quickly get to a resolution or at a minimum a plan of action to get to a resolution. If that means you need to take the customers request to your manager or speak with another group, let the customer know your plan.

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Get on and get off – handle calls as quickly as possible, but do not rush the customer or make them feel they're being rushed. Sometimes this can be difficult for a couple of reasons:

1. There are customers that don't know how to end a call. Throughout the call they ask their questions and you provide all of the answers; they are not sure what to do now. Politely say, "Is there anything else I can help you with?" If they say no, simply reply "Thank you for calling. If there is anything else you need please give us a call". This provides them an out and you just ended the conversation.
2. You will run into a customer that is the ultimate conversationalist. They will keep talking as long as you let them. You can politely acknowledge their statement or comment, perhaps even chuckle a bit if called for, but refrain from entering into extensive conversation. Politely review their reason for calling, how it was answered, resolved or given a plan of action and politely ask if they need any additional information or assistance. If they say no, simply reply by thanking them for their call and advise them to call back if they have further questions.

Don't let your bad day reflect on your customers – and vice versa. Don't let a difficult customer make a bad day for you and affect other customers.

Knowledge is power – however, if you don't know the answer to a customer's question, don't make one up. Advise the customer that you will get the answer and set a follow-up to call or e-mail them as soon as you have the answer. If at all possible, provide the customer a timeframe of when to expect a response from you. This will alleviate any false expectations by the customer and prevent unnecessary repeat calls from the customer, which ultimately lead to customer frustration.

Know your voice tone - The words you say are important, but just as important is the tone of your voice while you are saying them. Is your voice tone sincere and polite or rude and angry? Voice tone and inflection sends a message to the listener, or in our case, the customer. Although you may genuinely be sincere, your tone could reflect anger, rudeness or even disrespect. This is a quick turn-off to a customer.

To test your voice tone, enlist the assistance of friends or family members. Set up a mock situation and record yourself, or if you don't have a way to record it, ask someone to listen while you play out a customer service call with another person. Also, do not hesitate to ask friends and family how you come across to them in various conversations (calm, controversial, etc.) Most often they will be (brutally) honest with you.

Be polite – kindness and politeness is like sugar, sweetening even the worst of situations. When a customer is frustrated, angry or concerned they are looking to you to help them. Responding negatively, harshly or without concern will only worsen the situation and very likely cost the company a customer.

Know your customer – If you keep referring to Mrs. Johnson of Jackson Avenue as Mrs. Jackson of Johnson Avenue, you can be sure she will not continue doing business with your company. While any business can make a mistake, constant misspelled names and similar foul-ups do not encourage regular customers to return.

When taking information from a customer, establish time in the collection process to repeat the information back to the customer to be sure it is correct.

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Company Commitment to Customer Service

Great customer service is not an accident. It takes effort, dedication and commitment. This commitment and support is required from everyone in the company including the Business Owner/CEO, Upper Management and the customer service staff. Whether customer service is provided by a live person, by phone, by live on-line support or by e-mail, providing excellent customer service requires all company personnel to commit to and practice the following:

1. **Commit to quality.** Everyone in the company needs to be devoted to creating a positive experience for the customer. Always try to go above and beyond customer expectations.
2. **Know your products.** To gain a customer's trust and confidence, knowledge about products and services is a must. Know your company's products, services and return/cancellation policies inside out.
3. **Treat people with courtesy and respect.** Remember that every contact with a customer — whether it's by email, phone, written correspondence, or face-to-face meeting — leaves an impression of your company. Always acknowledge your customer by using phrases like "sorry to keep you waiting," "thank you for your order," "you're welcome," "if you need any further assistance please be sure to contact," and "it's been a pleasure assisting you." Always thank the customer for choosing your company.
4. **Never argue with a customer.** As you know, the customer is not always right. But your focus needs to remain on how to correct or alleviate the situation. According to research, 7 out of 10 customers will do business with you again if you resolve a complaint favorably to the customer.
5. **Don't leave customers hanging.** Repairs, callbacks and emails need to be handled with a sense of urgency. Customers want immediate resolution, and if you can give it to them, you'll probably win their repeat business. Research shows that 95 percent of customers will do business with a company again if their complaint is resolved on the spot.
6. **Always provide what you promise.** Don't promise what you can't deliver. Fail to deliver and you'll lose credibility — and customers. If you guarantee a quote within 24 hours, get the quote out within 24 hours or less. If you can't make good on your promise, apologize to the customer and offer some type of compensation, such as a discount or free delivery.
7. **Assume that customers are telling the truth.** No matter how outrageous or unbelievable, even if it appears that customers are lying or giving you a hard time, always give them the benefit of the doubt. The majority of customers don't like to complain; most customers will go out of their way to avoid it.
8. **Focus on making customers rather than sales.** Those who get paid on commission, sometimes focus on just making sales instead of customer service or the quality of the sale. Remember, a forced or pushed sale will earn business, but good customer service will keep a customer's business. In the end, it is more important than closing a sale. Research shows that it costs six times more to attract a new customer than it does to keep an existing one.

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Keeping Your Customers Loyal

Although it is easy to get caught up in managing the day-to-day business, every once in a while you need to sit back and take stock of how you're running your business, specifically your customer support. Is the phone system meeting your needs? Is your staff well versed in your products or service? And most importantly, are you focusing on your greatest asset of all: your customers? Sometimes we get so caught up in the mechanics and numbers of doing business that we forget the reason we're in business in the first place.

With the below tips, you'll learn to establish a way to keep your customers loyal to you.

A. Incorporate Customer Service into Your Business Culture

Customer service should be as routine as the manufacturing of your product or service. And it can be accomplished with simple measures. Often it's the small things that customers remember: a phone call returned on time, knowledge of your product or service, showing respect or a quick resolution to an issue.

B. Small Businesses Have a Customer Service Advantage

An advantage of being a small business is that it's usually easier to respond quickly and personally to customer inquiries. Put yourself in your customers' shoes. Ask yourself how you would like to be treated, and then act accordingly. Remember to be proactive toward your customers as well as reactive to their concerns and questions.

C. Respond to Customers Quickly

When dealing with customers or clients over the telephone, try not to put them on hold for longer than 30 – 60 seconds. If you expect to be tied up for longer than that, take a message and respond as soon as possible.

D. Communicate with Your Customers

Keep your customers apprised of the status of their accounts, especially if there are going to be delays. If someone's order is held up, let them know as soon as possible. If you promise to have a job done by a certain date and there are glitches, tell your client right away and let them know when you expect the issue will be resolved.

E. Let Customers Know You Appreciate their Business

Thank customers for their business. If customers regularly visit your place of business, make them feel welcome with coffee. Also, if customers are likely to bring children to your store or office, keep a basket of toys handy. Harried parents will appreciate the distraction, and are likely to stick around longer if their children are occupied.

F. Ask Customers for Feedback

You continually ask yourself how your business is doing and you should always be sure to ask your customers as well. This can be done while on the phone, by sending them postage-paid response cards or you can make a questionnaire available in your place of business and encourage your customers to complete it.

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Staff Training and Policies

Good customer service is a valuable asset, especially in today's high-tech-oriented, increasingly impersonal business world. Therefore, if you are aware of common customer service mistakes and go out of your way to avoid them, you may strengthen your position in a competitive market.

1. **Untrained staff.** It does not matter whether you have two or 200 employees, you must train everyone in the art of customer service. Customers or clients will not tolerate rudeness, incorrect information, or apathy on the part of your staff. Not training the staff – which should include everyone – is a major mistake made by too many businesses.
2. **Trying to win the argument.** It is worth remembering that it takes five times more effort (and cost) to gain one new customer as it takes to maintain one current customer. Therefore, by winning an argument and losing a steady customer, you are costing your business a valuable customer.
3. **Inaccessibility.** If you want to see repeat business, you need to be accessible to your customers. If it is difficult to contact the customer service department or speak to a manager, customers may not return. Many businesses, especially on the Internet, try to maintain a distance from their customers. This rarely works.

Although not absolutely necessary it is suggested that your company have a toll free number for customer support.

Standing by your policy – If you're going to establish policies, be customer sensitive.

While the clerk can say "that's our policy," customer service representatives and managers must be flexible and authorized to bend policies to build customer relationships. A quick way to lose a customer is to tell them "If I do that for you, I'll have to do it for everyone" or "That's our policy and there is nothing I can do."

- **Unfulfilled promises.** If you promised a customer that something would be ready by Thursday, then it should have been there by Thursday. There are no excuses, and the only words you need to remember are "we're sorry," backed up by an extra effort to make the customer happy.
- **Poor record keeping.** Again we use the example, if you keep referring to Mrs. Johnson of Jackson Avenue as Mrs. Jackson of Johnson Avenue, you can be sure she will not continue doing business with your company.
- **The runaround.** When someone calls for customer service, they expect a service representative to be the first or second person they speak to, following a receptionist perhaps. People do not like being passed from one person to another repeatedly or sent from one department to another in a retail location. Passing the buck is akin to passing the customer on to your competitor.
- **Email/online cop outs.** Since email is impersonal, many businesses send a form letter or a programmed response that answers 10 common FAQs, none of which may apply to a particular customer. Other businesses simply ignore customer complaints hoping the customer will simply forget about the issue. These are email cop outs, or excuses for not providing adequate customer service. It is very simple for a customer representative to respond to each inquiry in a timely fashion.
- **Forgetting the basics.** "Please," "thank you," "we're sorry about the inconvenience," and so on are simple phrases that cost nothing, take little effort, and win big points.

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Third-Party Service Companies and Distributors

So you read all of the above and you say ‘But we represent other companies and have to follow their policies’. After applying and following all of the above, you have a little bit more homework to do then. While it is highly improbable that you can or will remember every product and policy of all the products and companies you may represent, that doesn’t mean you are unable to provide customer service.

Keep a file of each company and its product or services. This file can be electronic or hard copy. Review it constantly to know it inside and out so you can quickly find and refer to the information to respond to a customer’s inquiry or resolve an issue. If the situation cannot be resolved with the information you have, do not hesitate to have a representative from the company you are representing contact the customer directly or if your business allows, have the customer contact them directly. Most customers will be appreciative and respect your desire to resolve the issue and will remain a loyal customer.

Communications

Communication is the crux of providing excellent customer service. Below are a few tips in communication:

Written Communications:

Watch your abbreviations – you should always use your full name and avoid using your initials as a signature. If you must use your initials be careful of what they can spell or how they can be interpreted. For instance; if your name is Heather Ellen Adams, your initials of ha or hea can be interpreted as laughing. The initials of the name of Adam Samuel Smith could be very offending.

Check spelling and grammar – In today’s fast paced society and high-tech world many communications are done through e-mail. While this expedites responses it also allows for inaccuracies. One solution (or assist) is to be sure your mail program has spell-check turned on. If your program does not have an automated spell check feature, most programs have a manual spell check function. Be sure to run spell check manually before sending your e-mail.

Verbal Communications:

Be Professional at all times. Refrain from using slang, childish or derogatory speech. Speak to your customer with respect.

Be clear and concise when speaking. Speak at a pace that your customer will be able to understand and comprehend your statement or question, and avoid using jargon.

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To improve your written and/or verbal communication skills there are many seminars and training classes available. Click the text below to view available seminars and training classes:

[Communicating with Professionalism](#)

[Business Writing and Grammar](#)

On-line Customer Service

When providing customer service in a traditional brick-and-mortar world you are generally dealing with your customers face-to-face. The service you provide may be a bit easier as you can read the customer much easier. If a customer needs help, he or she can look around and find someone. In e-commerce, it is a little more difficult as your service is dependent upon a customer contacting you and you need to be able to read your customer based on voice or text. So how can you provide customer service as a part of your online sales experience? It's generally easier than you think. With today's technology combined with good customer service skills there are several ways that you can provide high-quality customer service with a minimum amount of work.

Offer Live on-line chat

Live on-line chat is a great option for most start-up e-businesses and established businesses that have decided to take their products and services to the internet. It gives you the option of providing real-time help without having the customer take extra steps to contact you and allows you to service more than one customer at a time in many instances. Your current staff can be utilized with proper training. Another important note for success in utilizing a live on-line chat is to make sure your site clearly states when representatives are available to help. Once you have set your live chat hours, be sure to stick to them.

Phone support

Although some may argue that traditional phone support for an e-business is passé, at this juncture, a combination of live on-line chat, e-mail and phone support will provide a means of communication for all your clients. The telephone is still needed. For many clients, it's the preferred way to communicate as it adds a personal touch. You may be able to hash out in two or three minutes on the phone what it would take 10 emails to achieve. Once again, be sure to post your support hours on your website and reiterate these hours on your voice mail system or answering machine.

Automated Order tracking

Many of the inquiries you'll receive from customers will be about the status of their orders. Automating the order-tracking process is important to your business. Whether you are creating your own shopping cart or installing an off-the-shelf program many shopping cart programs offer or include integrated order tracking. This will dramatically reduce on the amount of e-mail or phone calls you receive from customers looking for their merchandise.

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Once you ship an order, you will mark it as shipped and enter the appropriate tracking information into your shopping cart application. Most shopping carts will even generate an automated email message to provide the customer with the tracking information. If your cart supports notifications, from pending to shipped, or shipped to delivered, it can greatly reduce the amount of work you have to do.

Be sure to include detailed information on your website of the steps of the order process and order tracking system so your customer knows how to proceed and what to expect. This is especially true if the system will be sending automated e-mail notifications. These can be easily interpreted to be spam and filtered out.

Implement an Electronic (On-line) Support program

Just as customers came to you via the internet and through your website, they will expect you to have electronic means to support any issues. Invariably, merchandise will be damaged in shipping, or a customer may need to exchange a product or have some other concern. Implementing an on-line support program will help expedite a return, exchange or any other support your customer may need for the product or service they have purchased. Be sure to advise the customer of the expected response time. As mentioned previously in this book, one of the greatest sources of irritation to the customer is when they do not receive a response or call back in a timely manner (sometimes based on their own expectations).

Support programs can be fairly simple: customers come to your site, click a support link, and are prompted to submit their information including order history such as product name, model number, date of purchase, etc. The program will send you the information to process the requests and respond to the customer as necessary. You'll want to be sure the customer has a means to log back in to the support area and that he or she will receive your response, along with the appropriate return or exchange instructions. This system works very well if you have a lot of customers.

Customer support for online businesses isn't really that different from providing support in a traditional business. As long as you take care of your customers, they will keep coming back.

Although not absolutely necessary it is suggested that your company have a toll free number for customer support.

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Expanding Your Concept of Service

From [Customer Service For Dummies, 2nd Edition](#)

Your definition of service shapes every interaction you have with your customers. If you hold the common idea that service is only giving customers what they want, you may well paint yourself into a corner every time a customer asks for something that is impossible for you to provide. If, on the other hand, you expand your definition of service to include fulfilling the multitude of less obvious customer needs, you will never encounter a time when you can't provide your customers with some level of service.

By addressing less obvious customer needs such as listening with empathy to customers when they have a problem or providing options and alternatives when you can't give customers exactly what they want, you widen the gap between you and your competitors.

Six basic needs

Every time customers do business with you, they are, without fully realizing it, scoring you on how well you are doing, not only at giving them what they want, but at fulfilling six basic customer needs. Following is a list of these needs:

- **Friendliness:** The most basic of all customer needs, friendliness is usually associated with being greeted politely and courteously.
- **Understanding and empathy:** The second most basic of all customer needs.
- **Fairness:** The need to be treated fairly is high up on most customers' list of needs.
- **Control:** Control represents the customers' need to feel as if they have an impact on the way things turn out.
- **Options and alternatives:** Customers need to feel that other avenues are available to getting what they want accomplished.
- **Information:** Customers need to be educated and informed about the products, policies, and procedures they encounter when dealing with your company.

A popular piece of customer service folklore states that if you give customers what they ask for (just say yes), then you end up with satisfied customers. This folklore is false. Customers do ask for what they want, but they usually don't ask for these six basic needs. When did you last go into a pizzeria and say, "I'd like one slice of pepperoni pizza, please," and then add, "Could you please be understanding, friendly, and fair?" Customers don't ask for these other needs, but they miss such gestures when they are not provided. To really provide top quality customer service, you need to move beyond the yes folklore to fulfill all your customers' needs.

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The needs of your customers not only vary according to their individual personalities but can also change depending on the nature of your business. A trip to Disneyland, for example, is remembered for the fun and safety of the park and rides. These two service qualities are part of what makes a day with the mouse so enjoyable and memorable. Compare this excursion with a visit to your accountants. In this situation, your needs are more in the realm of accuracy and certainty. You would be suspicious if your accountant was having fun — when you weren't — and started to laugh uncontrollably during a meeting. Along with the six basic service qualities, dozens more exist that are specific to different businesses and occupations.

Reconsider who your customers are

Who are your customers, really? Too often, the definition of customer is limited to someone who is outside of our company. Look up customer in your dictionary. The first definition of customer is a person who buys. The second definition is a person with whom one has dealings.

In fact, everyone who works in a company has customers regardless of whether they work with external, paying customers or internal co-workers. Customers fall into external and internal categories.

- **The external customer:** These are the people you deal with, either face-to-face or over the phone, who buy products or services from you. They are customers in the traditional sense of the word. Without them there would be no sales, no business, no paycheck. If your definition of a customer stops here, you are only seeing half the picture.
- **The internal customer:** The other half of the picture is the people who work inside your company and rely on you for the services, products, and information that they need to get their jobs done. They are not traditional customers, yet they need the same tender, loving care you give to your external customers.

By expanding your definition of a customer to include your co-workers, you are taking a vital step toward excellent service.

The internal customer chain works both ways. Sometimes you are the customer and other times you are the service provider. For example, a co-worker may come to you and ask for a printout of a report. In this case, you are the service provider because you are giving him what he needs. However, ten minutes later, you may turn around and go to that same co-worker and ask for help on a project; now you are the customer.

The customer chain

The relationship between internal customers and external customers is what forms the customer chain. If you have a back room kind of job where you rarely see the light of day, let alone a living, breathing customer, you can easily begin to feel that your work has little or no impact on external customers. But if you look at the bigger picture, you can see that everyone in a company plays some part in fulfilling the customers' needs. Barely an hour goes by during the day when you are not, in some form or another, providing something for somebody. Each interaction with an internal customer is an important link in a chain of events that always ends up at the external customers' feet.

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About two years ago, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article entitled, "Poorly treated employees treat the customer just as poorly." Boy, does that hit the nail on the head! A frightening percentage of managers do not realize that their staffs are their internal customers, and that the quality of service that a company provides to its customers is a direct reflection of how the staff of the company is treated by their managers. Make it a priority to view your staff as one of your most important customers and treat them accordingly. Doing so means focusing not on what your staff can do to make your job easier, but on what you can do to make their jobs easier.

Many companies seem to overlook another very important link in the service chain — their vendors. By using the techniques of customer service with your vendors, you will not only enhance your relationship with them but also receive better service.

And one final note about becoming a quality customer service practitioner. Customer service is not relegated to work. We are serving customers all day long who ask us questions and put demand on our time from children to our spouse to extended family coworkers and friends. You can apply your newly learned or in some cases customer service skill reminders included in this guide to better understand the needs of all whom you come in contact with on a daily basis. By increasing your level of understanding of their needs wants and desires and by being sensitive to those needs and dealing with them as your most important customer you will realize immeasurable reciprocal value and personal reward and fulfillment as a result.

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Important to Remember – Your responsibility is to service customers. If there are No Customers then no Customer Service is needed, which means no job for you! Providing excellent customer service can be job security.

See next page for Reader Bonus

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