
7 Keys To Exceptional Customer Service

7 KEYS TO EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

by Kathleen Gage

“The less said, the better.” You’ve heard that one before and, no doubt, have even found circumstances where the old axiom applies. One place it does NOT apply is customer service. In fact, the less said, the more in the dark you are.

“Seventy percent of your unhappy customers will never say anything. The other 30% will tell 11 people. Those 11 will each tell five others. Counting the original customer, that’s 67 people talking about your incompetence. Multiply that times however many unhappy customers are within that 30%.” -- Department of Consumer Affairs and General Motors

Delivering exceptional customer service is an ongoing process, not just a one-time event. It’s all about having happy customers rather than just satisfied customers. Your current service levels could well be costing you business.

Companies that emphasize excellent customer service recognize the fact that typically they will spend considerably more to obtain a new customer as they do to retain an existing one. You can lose an existing customer in a moment, where it may take months, or even years, to find a new one. It is a wise business owner, president, manager or CEO who realizes the benefit of training themselves and their employees on how to provide excellent customer service.

THE PRIMARY BENEFITS OF EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE ARE:

- Referrals
- Improved attitudes internally due to positive feedback from customers
- Increased sales
- Stronger bottom line
- Likelihood of more job security

The best way for you to stand out from the competition is by providing exceptional customer service on a daily basis. Here are seven recommendations to help you do just that:

1. TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THE CUSTOMER. When you say you are going to do something, do it. Pay attention to details. It’s amazing how many people will work hard to get the sale and once they do, they get lazy. Do you continue to take care of the customer after the sale? The more you stay on top of the details the easier your job will be and the more content your customer will be. It’s not about making a sale; it’s about making a friend. Friends return.

2. UNDER PROMISE, OVER DELIVER: Set yourself up for success by promising a satisfactory solution and delivering much more. If your standard delivery time is one week, let the customer know it may take a week and a half. That way when you deliver in less time you will be giving the customer excellent service. Most people over promise and under deliver just to make a sale. This will almost guarantee the loss of a customer. Your minimum

must be delivery as promised; your goal should be more than that.

3. BE ORGANIZED: This simply means to be prepared. The more prepared you are the more you can handle the unexpected emergencies. A more efficient system translates to greater profitability. Build a tickler file to keep you reminded of where you stand with each and every customer. Carve out a portion of every day to keep your file current.

4. TREAT EVERY CUSTOMER WITH RESPECT: It's amazing how many companies, whether they are in manufacturing, retail, food service or any other industry seem to forget that the customer ultimately pays the bills. Treat each customer as if they are the most important person to your business because ultimately, they are. You would be astounded to know how many very wealthy people shop in clothing a bag lady would reject. Don't judge; serve. It can really pay off!

5. GREET EACH CUSTOMER: If you are in retail, when someone walks into your place of business greet them personally. How often have you walked into a store only to be ignored because the clerks were too busy catching up on the latest soap opera? When a customer enters your place of business, they are your business. Research has shown that a cheerful greeting has a positive effect on the bottom line. Sam Walton knew.

6. FOLLOW-UP: Send thank you letters or cards, when appropriate. If you say you will call with an answer on a specific date, do so. Even if the only answer you have is that you have not yet gotten the answer. In some instances you will want to take your client out for a meal or send a thank you gift. It's also a good idea to call your customers after the goods have been delivered to see if the delivery was satisfactory and if the merchandise was all the

customer hoped. These little details can make all the difference.

7. KEEP IN TOUCH: Periodically, drop a line, make a call or e-mail a message just to say hello. If you find a magazine article you know would be of interest to your customer, clip it out and send it. If you have several customers who would be interested in the same article, photocopy it with a personal note and highlight the information your customer would be interested in. Keeping in touch is more than simply sending a standard holiday card in December. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations are wonderful opportunities to make a contact. Here's a warning: don't send a card or note along with any kind of advertising or come-on to your business. That's a sure way to cheapen your effort and alienate your customer.

How can you accomplish all of the above and make dealing with your company a pleasant and rewarding experience? Primarily, it is about making a commitment to excellence. Remembering, always, why you are in the business you are in. Take the time to understand your customer's needs completely and you will never need to search for new customers.

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