

Delivering Great Customer Service - 10 Tips

One of the key components of an effective retention strategy is exceptional customer service. Not just good service, but memorable service. Today, consumers expectations are higher than ever and companies that fail to deliver, risk losing market share. Here are 10 Tips for Delivering Good Customer Service.

It almost goes without saying that good customer service is essential to sustaining any business. No matter how wonderful a job you do of attracting new customers, you won't be profitable for long unless you have a solid customer retention strategy in place and in action. It's the actions that count not what you say you'll do, or what the policy says. People will remember what you or your employees have done or not done.

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10 Tips for Delivering Good Customer Service.

1) Treat me like a somebody. It's been years since that Midas muffler commercial aired, but the I'm a somebody phrase can still be heard from time to time. Why? Because regular customers expect (and deserve) to be remembered. As one woman summed it up, You don't need to remember my name, or what I order, but do acknowledge that I've been there before.

One of the best examples I've ever seen of this is at my local coffee shop. One day I noticed that the young man behind the counter greeted some people by name and, even if he didn't know their name, he knew what they usually ordered. As I waited for my tea (he'd already placed my two milk on the side on the counter without me having said a word), I asked him why he said, See you later to some customers,

See you tomorrow to others, yet always said, Have a good week to me. The smiling, friendly reply? Because you only come in on Mondays and Fridays. As I thanked him, I thought to myself, Wow. He won't be here long. Unfortunately, I was right.

2) Be polite! Too frequently company representatives ask customers for file information without saying Please or even being polite. It is not acceptable for a service rep to simply bark out, Account number? And it is never acceptable for a service rep to insult a client.

Six weeks ago, there was a problem with my home internet account which is with a phone carrier I have used my entire life (and, as you know, this kind of loyalty to a phone company is almost unheard of these days). In all that time, I have never been late with a bill payment to them. There is a long and ugly story here, but the short version is that a) the problem was on their end and b) before they realized where things had gone wrong, their rep was extremely rude. When I asked him to please change the way in which he was addressing me, he snarled, Well shady expect? If you'd pay your bills on time you wouldn't have this problem.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. In fact, if I'd just read this account (instead of being on the receiving end), I wouldn't have believed the story. What's worse is that although the company later apologized, their senior management seemed to feel that this was not an isolated incident.

A 2005 survey conducted by Schulich School of Business MBAs suggests that this kind of problem exists in over 30% of companies, and costs them hundreds of millions of dollars in lost customers (and revenues) each and every year. Don't let your company end up one of these statistics.

3) Thank your customers like you mean it. When your employees conclude a transaction, they should thank the customer with a smile and a sincere thank you for completed by whatever is appropriate for your business. Too often, customers received a rushed and barely civil Thanks-Have-a-nice-day-Next. With large purchases, the verbal greeting should be followed up with a hand-written card not just because it leads to increased referrals (which it does), but because it is the correct thing to do.

Oh, and by the way, the word Sur is no way to respond when a customer thanks you. To many people in many parts of the world, this is dismissive and suggests you don't care. The correct phrase is You're welcome.

4) Appearances do count! According to two independent pieces of research, nearly 90% of customers form an impression about how competent and reputable your company is based on what they see when they walk through your doors.

Preserve me from auto-attendant hell. Customers are becoming increasingly annoyed and frustrated with having to sift through a multitude of options and press numerous buttons only to be told that the desired service can only be obtained through the company's website. Worse is when the auto-attendant uses voice recognition but doesn't recognize your voice. People want to connect with human beings; they don't want to listen to a long list of prompts. For hints on how to use auto-attendants effectively, please read The top 5 new things people expect for good customer service on our ReallyGreatInfo.com website.

5) Do what you say you will... when you say you will. The expression Under promise, over deliver may have become somewhat hackneyed through over use, but is still germane. One of the quickest ways to lose customer confidence is to not follow-through, or to be late delivering a service or product, without notifying the customer in advance, determining whether or not the delay will impact the customer and providing an alternate solution in the interim if necessary.

One of the best examples I ever experienced of a company doing it well happened with Toyota. There was a problem with my RAV4 and Toyota couldn't repair it easily. I was driving a loaner, but had planned to go camping with my kids. It was our summer holiday and it had been planned for months. When Toyota couldn't repair my vehicle in time, they rented an SUV for us to use without me having to ask. I have since purchased another vehicle from this dealership and recommended it to 6 others who have purchased from them. Coincidence? I think not.

6) Surprise the customer from the time to time. When it is possible to provide an extra level of service, do so. Whether it's an unexpected complimentary dessert in a restaurant, or an upgrade that has not been requested, these special gestures go a long way towards engendering customer loyalty and to winning you new customers. It has long been known that on average, a dissatisfied customer will tell 10 - 16 others, but people who have had an unexpectedly good experience also recount their stories.

7) Provide full service. When Successors sends out its framed prints, it includes the hooks and a small levelling device. There's a remote-control toy vendor near me who includes the batteries. My gas station dispenses free coffee with gas on weekday mornings. A drive-through drycleaner in northern Ontario opens early and hands you the morning paper with your order. Small things, yes. Greatly appreciated? No question.

I spoke to each of my local retailers and learned that in each case, their sales and profits have enjoyed double digits increases since they introduced more comprehensive service. Think about what you can add to help make things easier for your customers. In some cases, by looking at what else it makes sense to sell, you can even add a new revenue stream while improving the perceived level of customer service provided.

8) Mea Culpa. When you have made a mistake, admit it and set things straight. When customers have a complaint listen, truly listen. Then apologize and take corrective action. In many instances, the very act of listening (without interrupting) can be enough to diffuse the situation and make the person feel worthy as a customer. Then ask the customer how they would like you to resolve the situation. In most instances, your client will come up with something reasonable and often less costly than a solution you might have proposed.

9) Listen to your customers. Conduct your own surveys and get feedback on what they like and don't like - and take corrective action as required. Let customers know that their business is appreciated and that their opinions are important to you.

None of these suggestions takes a lot of time or money to implement, yet they can pay dividends in increased customer satisfaction and retention. The key, though, is to ensure that employees understand the importance of their front-line role and get good training and supervision.