

Customer Service with Passion and Principles

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In 1979, long before customer service came into vogue, I designed the world's first customer service training programme. I felt that if organisations would make their customers feel special, wanted, and appreciated, they would have loyal customers. The way to do that was by giving front line employees the needed tools to deliver great service and to create impressions that form an organisation's reputation.

I have a concise and practical list of six essential customer service principles for awesome service. These 'Personal Steps of Excellence' would go well in a frame on your office wall and those of your general managers.

1. Feel Good About Yourself.

Employees do not go to work dreaming about how they can work exceptionally hard to make the company and the owner more money. Be realistic. Many employees have personal problems. The more we can uplift the self-worth and self-image of employees, the more they become productive and feel like there is a win-win relationship. In return they will deliver a higher level of excellence. Each of us has the responsibility to look after our own feelings and give ourselves recognition for good work. We need to commit ourselves to goals that are worthy of our abilities. When you know you are doing your best for both customers and working associates, you will feel good. Concentrate on your strengths. Recognise the importance of your role. You can make the difference.

2. Practise Habits of Courtesy.

It takes seconds for a customer to tell if you care. Frankly, it does not take additional time to be nice. Too many firms believe this is customer service. Everyone has the right to expect courtesy from you. To be so self-centered or preoccupied with your work that you forget to show courtesy with each contact is to signal that you don't care. On- the-job practices of courtesy are an important part of everyone's role to signal respect. The more you give, the more you care.

3. Give Positive Spoken Feedback.

Communicate verbally and non-verbally with positive communications. The smile and calling a customer by their name is all part of this whether it is in person or on the telephone. It costs you nothing but a little effort and the rewards are great. Every human contact is an opportunity to give the gift of good feelings through the words you say. People can't read your mind; what you say is evidence that you care.

4. Perform for the Customer

Do what you said you were going to do. If you promise to call someone on Tuesday, call them on Tuesday. Keep your promises. Too many employees

lie or make excuses when there is a problem. Customers have the right to demand performance. They aren't interested in our problems and excuses. We constantly need to ask ourselves 'Is our performance resulting in satisfied customers?' 'Don't promise what you can't deliver. Deliver what you promise' is a good guideline.

5. Listen Carefully

This is so rare. When someone asks your name you will have to repeat it several times. Few employees have any interest in listening. Some are told to ask questions but seldom will they listen to your answer. Jobs can become routine. When you see hundreds of customers, you can become desensitized to an individual. You have to concentrate on each person. Get in tune with their situation, their attitudes, and needs. Anticipate, read between the lines, ask questions, get involved - to show you care and to know what will satisfy the customer. Even complaints are a positive resource if you listen and act.

6. Learn and Grow in Your Job

Know everything about your products and services. Too often employees have no concept or understanding of their products and services. You can tell in a few seconds if the employee really knows what they are talking about.

Grow where you're planted. Every job offers an opportunity for greatness. In a sense, every day you either grow or die mentally. Learn about your company, learn about your products, and learn about your customers. With learning comes self-fulfillment.

John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru, he has written seven books on customer service. The Service Quality Institute (www.customer-service.com) has developed more than 26 customer service training programmes that have been distributed and presented throughout the world.

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