



# **The Customer Service Training Institute**

**[www.customerservicetraininginstitute.com](http://www.customerservicetraininginstitute.com)**

# Customer Service Basics

## Fundamentals of Customer Service

### Introduction

Unless you are very new to the marketplace, or have lived in a vacuum for the last 10 years or so, you are aware of the continuing focus on Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction. These "buzz words" have been around for years. While some companies use them because "it's the current thing to do", most companies realize the importance of Quality Customer Service skills.

This publication is designed to present the very basic principles of Customer Service. These fundamentals are important because they form the building blocks on which you will build more advanced skills. Think of these fundamentals as a foundation of a house. If the foundation is strong, the house will remain intact for many years. If the foundation is weak, eventually the house will not get adequate support and will crumble. Give yourself a good foundation on which to build. While some of the information presented in these pages may appear very basic in content, you must remember that the very nature of Customer Service is very basic. Give your customers what they need, make them feel appreciated, and address their problems and concerns. Very basic principles, very important processes!

I would suggest that you read this publication at least twice. The first time, read it all the way through without stopping to take notes. Read it carefully and try to digest as much as possible. When you are finished, take a few days and see how you can apply some of the material and concepts to specific situations. You will notice that some topics repeat themselves throughout this manual. This is done for a very specific reason. Several skills in Customer Service have many benefits and accomplish several different things. We will take those skills and important topics and repeat them in different context so that you thoroughly understand the concept and all of its benefits. Also, some topics will require more than one skill set and in these situations, information may be repeated for clarity sake.

Now read this through a second time. Take notes when you feel something is relevant to you. Make sure you understand each concept and try to figure out one or two ways to implement that concept in your job or life. Write that particular concept down and the way you feel it can be implemented. When you get done, you should have a list of things you can do to implement what you have learned. What you will have before you will be a rough "blueprint" or action plan for you to follow.

Take this action plan and determine which things will make the most impact in your situation and then pick ONE concept to start off with. Resist the temptation to change and implement everything at once. We want to take it one step at a time and build one solid skill upon the other. Implement one concept until you become comfortable with it and it becomes kind of automatic with you. When you reach that point, tackle the next item. Continue until you have completed our action plan.

If you follow this plan you will find yourself with a good and solid foundation of skills that will serve you well for the rest of your life. Spend the time now. It will reward you many times over in the future!

# Why Customer Service Is Important!

Every day the business climate changes. Those who can adapt and keep pace survive. Those that don't, fail. This may seem like an over simplification, but it is true none the less.

Today's marketplace is growing at a rate that is unprecedented. The emergence of the Internet as a business resource has changed the way business is being done. Changed it in a way that will affect each and every business in the world today! Let's take a look at why this is so important.

It used to be that any business had a certain "territory" in which they did their business. This territory may have been shaped by the product or service the company provided, or by shipping and handling restrictions. The most common reason for limited territories was that it just was not possible to reach everyone in the world in a cost-effective manner.

These limited territories meant that each company had a limited amount of competition. Similar businesses within the area were known to their competition and each of these businesses could be monitored for their actions, sales, and other issues. In short, if you were "on the ball", you would not be taken by surprise by a competitor and your business placed at risk.

Because of this, a company may not be as aggressive when it comes to dealing with their customers. With limited competition, the options for their customers were also limited. If there are two companies selling a certain product or service in an area, that means there are only two options for customers to obtain that product. Customers can go to either company, but they must choose one or the other.

When a customer has limited options, they may have to put up with a level of service that is less than they would like to see. In many areas, two businesses can survive quite nicely together with little competition between the two. When this is the case, there is little incentive to improve on the level of service they provide their customers. Since customer service costs money, there is little reason to spend money when their customer's options are so limited.

## **Enter A New Way of Doing Business!**

Technology has given businesses a whole new way of reaching potential customers. Small television stations have harnessed the power of satellites to

put their signals into the homes of people all over the world. A once small station now has the power to reach a wide range of prospective customers!

Fax machines enable people to communicate much easier over their regular phone lines. Cell phones allow people to contact each other 24 hours a day, whether they are at home or on the road. Computers are available to manage inventory, create complex sales presentations, and reach people instantly through the use of e-mail! The options for businesses are growing by leaps and bounds! While this is certainly impressive, all this pales when compared to what is definitely the single most important business tool developed to date: The Internet!

The Internet enables businesses of all shapes and sizes to compete on an equal level no matter where they are located. This is a very important concept. This concept will forever change the way business is being done all over the world! Let's explore the impact of the Internet on business today.

### **The Internet & its Impact on Customer Service and Business**

In the past, new and small businesses had to commit large sums of money and overhead in order to break through in their industry. Businesses had to start out in a small territory and gradually expand as their capital allowed. Big business had the resources to combat these small businesses and cause many of them to fail. Many a small business has failed because they couldn't compete with the "big boys"!

With the Internet, businesses of all shapes and sizes are placed before the public in an equal manner. When a person logs on to a website, they have no idea of what kind of company they are dealing with. The new company operating from a small office in a garage somewhere can have the same appearance as the established giant with the huge office complex! The content of the web site is what you see and what you base your decisions on.

Because of this, every business can compete in as large or small area as they desire! By placing their company products on the Internet, they can reach potential customers all over the world instead of just their "backyard"! Let's take a look at how that affects business in general.

### **A Whole New Set of Rules**

With the arrival of the Internet, customers have an entire new source of businesses and resources available to them. Now, instead of being limited to what is in their town or state, they can contact companies from around the world to buy their goods and services!

Let's take a look at what has changed for the consumer. Let's say that you want to buy a certain kind of power tool. Maybe it's an electric drill, saw, or other tool. In the past, you would go to the local tool or hardware center and buy it there. They may not have exactly what you want, or carry all the different models, but you would buy something that closely fit your needs. In some cases, you would look into the Yellow Pages for other stores close to your town. In most cases, you would visit each store and examine their selection and then return to the store that had what you wanted.

With the arrival of the Internet, you can contact manufacturers directly and buy over the Internet! You can use a search engine to find all kinds of sites that sell this particular product. There are even comparison sites that will give you a list of businesses that sell these tools and give you the prices! All without leaving your house! You can see everything available to you and buy something that fits your needs exactly, not something that just comes close!

You may be thinking that this manual is an advertisement for the Internet. I assure you it is not. What we are trying to teach you is that with the advent of things like the Internet, the marketplace changes, and you must adapt your skills to meet these changes. Here is why technology has forced us to change the way we react and deal with people:

We have discussed the whole new set of resources available to consumers today. Since our customers have more options available to them, they are going to seek out and do business with the company or companies that make them feel the most appreciated and needed! When consumer options are limited, customers feel like they have to accept less. As consumer options increase, they feel entitled to be treated better and more fairly. They become more rigid in what they want, how they expect to be treated, and what they will and will not accept.

Because of these facts, and other facts you will discover later in this publication, Customer Service Skills will become the most valuable and most sought after skills in employees of virtually every industry and position today.

### **The Days of Ignorance Are Long Gone!**

Another impact that the Internet has had on all kinds of consumers, businesses, and our population on the whole, is that it is extremely easy to get any kind of information. Whenever a person wants to find out anything, they can search the Internet and come up with hundreds or thousands of potential sources of information.

How does that effect Customer Service you may wonder? When a customer comes wants to purchase a product or service, they will no longer take your word for the quality or exclusivity of your product. They will search and

search until they get the information they require. Because of this, you must be honest and straightforward when it comes to talking about your company and its products. You cannot count on ignorance to get you through any more. Treat each customer like they are experts on your company and products.

Your customers are likely to become aware of your competition, too. Now that they are aware of additional resources available to them, you need to make sure you inform them of everything your company can offer that the competition can't. We'll get into this in detail a little later.

It is important for you to understand that people today are much more informed than they ever were before. Because of this, you must be prepared to deal with people on a whole other level. Make sure the information you give them is accurate and appropriate. Your credibility is at stake here. Be careful.

# Why Customer Service Skills?

Some of you may wonder why companies have made the investment in time and money for Customer Service Skills Training. It's a valid question that is not easy to answer with facts and figures. No one can tell you exactly how much money good customer service brings to the company's bottom line. There are too many unknowns. Because of this, it is not possible to "sell" a company on customer service by concentrating on profits.

Instead, we focus on a different set of values. We focus on the value of a customer and what he or she represents to a company. We focus on competition and what risks that poses to your company. We also focus on image and reputation.

Customer Service is a strong indicator on how your customers, and the general public, feel about your company. A company's reputation is a critical factor in its growth and long-term survival. Very few companies can survive by selling to a customer only once. The vast majority of companies require, and depend on, long-term repeat business from an established group of customers.

Our customers form perceptions about our company and its employees based on their experiences and what they have heard on TV, in the papers, and from other people. We will discuss perception later on but it is important that you understand that, while perceptions are not necessarily accurate, they do represent reality in the mind of the customer. Because of this, we must make every effort to have every experience all our customers have with our company as positive as possible.

Because of this, we must assure ourselves that we are doing everything in our power to make our company as pleasant as possible to deal with. We must make our products and services the very best we can and support them efficiently and properly. In short, we must give our customers what they want and make it satisfying to deal with us at the same time. In order to do that; let's take a look at what our customers are and what they represent to us. But first, please take the time to understand a very important concept:

## **The Customer's Frame of Mind!**

In order to effectively deal with your customer's problems, you need to understand their frame of mind when they come to you and how a different frame of mind will influence the way they react.



When a customer comes in to your store to buy something, they are usually in a positive frame of mind. They have spent time researching their decision, picking out the product or service, and have decided to make their purchase with you and your company. In some cases, this is as enjoyable a process as the actual purchase. Remember when you purchased your last new car or home. Remember the trips to the dealer, or drives with the real estate agent? Looking at what was out there. Imagining you in that car or home. Having fun anticipating owning that particular item when all is said and done. There is a certain excitement surrounding it. You're receptive to everyone's suggestions and thoughts. You gladly accept all information so that you can make an informed decision.

This is an extremely positive frame of mind. In a positive state of mind people communicate better, are more receptive to opposing viewpoints, and are genuinely open and honest in their communications.

Contrast that with this frame of mind:

You have a problem with a purchase. You must return to the store or stay on hold on the customer service line. Maybe you need to box up the item and return it. Hopefully there is another one in stock. You need to stand on the return line and fill out all sorts of forms and answer all sorts of questions. You need to spend time you really don't have resolving a situation that you did nothing to cause. How do you think your state of mind is now?

This state of mind is called a negative state. In this state of mind you very rarely are totally constructive in your communication efforts. You imagine roadblocks when there aren't any and you tend to be a little bit more on the defensive than usual.

As a rule, it is much easier to deal with people making a purchase rather than customer who have a problem. That is pretty much common sense. What you need to realize, however, is that the customer with the problem can be turned into your best and most loyal customer if you do the right things at the right time. This is where your customer service skills come into play. Turning terrorists into apostles is what it's all about.

# What Is A Customer?

Every business is in business to do one of two things. They either want to make money or to help people or various causes. Those are the two prime motivators for establishing and operating a business.

In order to fulfill either of these objectives, a business needs customers. A customer is the reason that every business is in business and stays in business. Without people to purchase things or people to help, there is no reason for a business to exist. Whenever a business loses its customers, it goes out of business. That's the stark reality of business. No customers, no income. No income, out of business. There is no escaping this.

Therefore, our customers are the very reason for our existence! It's important that we realize this! If our customers were to leave tomorrow, our business would fail and the people employed by that business would be out of work! With that in mind, let's take a look at what our customers are to us"

Our Customers are:

- The reason we are employed.
- The reason we can support our families.
- Worthy of our respect
- Free to do business with any company they desire.
- People, just like you and I.

Let's also take a look at what our customers are not.

Our Customers are NOT:

- An inconvenience.
- People that are tolerated.
- A distraction.
- An annoyance.

Our customers help pay our salaries. Their money helps us pay our rent or mortgage, buy food, get that new car, and go on that vacation we take every year. That money does not appear in our company's bank accounts like magic, it has to be earned. We earn that money by taking care of our customers every single day we go to work.

Our customers deserve our respect. In fact, they demand it! If a customer gets the feeling that you do not respect them as a person and customer, they

will leave your business and go to the competition and never even look back. Always show respect to every customer you deal with. It is one of the most important building blocks and skills to learn.

**IMPORTANT CONCEPT!! READ CAREFULLY!!**

Unless your business or industry is fortunate enough to be a monopoly, you have competition for your customers. This means that your customers have more than one source for the products and services you offer. Your competition may be a warehouse club, mail order firm, or one of the smaller retail businesses in your town. Whatever the source, competition is competition. Competition has always been a part of doing business but today things are tougher than ever before. Why? The Internet!

The emergence of the Internet has brought an entire new dimension to competition. Prior to the Internet, customers were limited to what was in their own neighborhood or what they read in a magazine or saw on television. That has all changed.

The Internet puts businesses from all over the world at the fingertips of your customers. Small businesses are able to directly compete with larger, more established companies over the Internet. Now your customer can purchase goods from you or any number of companies from all around the world! Competition has never been more aggressive and cutthroat. You may be asking yourself, so what?

The point is that every one of your customers has the right to purchase whatever they want from whomever they want! They are not obligated to buy from you unless they have signed a contract. Even if they have signed a contract, when that contract is up they can go to any other business they desire!

There is no such thing as customer loyalty anymore. The belief system and attitudes of the 50's and 60's are gone. It's a survival of the fittest mentality out there. In order to keep your customers buying from you, it is critical that you never provide them with a reason to want to purchase from any other business. This means keeping your customers happy every time, every day. Anything less is putting that relationship on shaky ground.

If you are not sure you agree with this, ask yourself two questions. First, if your company went out of business, could your customers survive? Then ask yourself: If your customers left, would your business survive? The answers to these two questions should give you the proper perspective!

Customer loyalty is earned. It is not to be expected.

Customers are also people like you and I. We will talk later about how to relate to your customers and how to communicate with them. Just always remember that they are people just like you and I.

Our customers should not be considered or treated like annoyances or inconveniences. They are the lifeblood of our business and should be treated as such. How many times have you waited for a clerk or cashier while they chatted away with friends or co-workers and seemed annoyed that they had to stop their conversation to help you? How did that make you feel? Probably not very good.

Everyone has several things or duties associated with their jobs. We all have paperwork to do and things to follow up on. Some of these duties will have deadlines associated with them. Along with these deadlines comes pressure to complete the tasks. If a customer should come between us and this deadline, we may express annoyance. This will be quickly picked up on by the customers.

Always treat the customer as #1. Remember that your customers are the most important resource your company has. Never treat them like an annoyance.

We all have a customer, or group of customers that we tolerate. Part of us wishes they would go elsewhere but we realize that we need their business and we put up with their demands and personalities. It is important that we treat them with respect whether they return that treatment to us or not. Always keep in mind that we need them more than they need us. Their business helps keep our company in business, which allows our company to pay our salaries. While sometimes we are tempted to tell them just what they can do with their business, we must show restraint and act with professionalism. To help us accomplish this, it will help if you understand,

# The Real Value of Your Customers!

Good customer service doesn't have to cost money. In fact, it has been shown that customer service skills can actually save a company money in the long run. Studies have shown that it can cost 5 - 10 times more to get a new customer than it does to keep an existing one happy! Let's talk about that for a moment.

Think about what has to happen for a customer to change from another company or product to your company. Your company has to prove to that customer that you can produce a better product, or do something better than the company that person is using now. How do you do that? You accomplish this by trying to alter that person's perception of your company. Several common ways to accomplish this are:

- Hiring of sales people to go out and solicit sales
- Create media advertising to showcase your products and services.
- Get exposure for your product in trade publications.
- Create promotional campaigns to promote your products and services.

All of the above cost money. A lot of money! The sole focus of the above is to bring new customers to your company. Companies need new customers in order to grow or even stay the same. Every year, a certain percentage of existing customers will leave your company no matter what you do. Some will die, some will move out of your area, and some will no longer have a use for your products. In order for your company to remain in business, you must have a steady stream of customer to replace the one that leave.

If you lose customers due to poor service, this increase the number of new customer you must bring in. This places an enormous burden on the company. Existing customers already know what you can do for them. They already found something in your company that they like. That gives you an incredible advantage. Don't provide an excuse to send your customer to your competition. Keep your customer service satisfaction rating high. Involve your customers in your business and follow their suggestions.

Keeping your existing customers just makes good business sense. You've worked hard to get them. Now work even harder to keep them. Think of your existing customers as an army of unpaid salespeople! People that will pass on their good experiences to those that may also need the products and service your company can provide! The other side of the coin is also true. Your customers can also relay tales of unpleasant experiences, which can drive

customer straight to your competition. Take care of your customer's everyday and keep them on your side!

### **How Much are your Customers Worth?**

When you think about your customers, how much do you think they are worth to your company? If someone buys \$100.00 worth of product from your company then that customer is worth \$100.00, right? Not necessarily! That customer could be worth much more!

It is important to know the real worth of a customer because the human mind tends to react differently to things of different value. For example, if you buy something for \$5.00 and it breaks two months later, you would probably throw it out and buy another one. If you purchased something for \$500.00 and it broke two months later, you would have a totally different reaction. You would demand repair or replacement and would expend whatever efforts required to accomplish that.

The same would hold true for treating your customers. You would treat a customer better if they represented a larger value to the company. You may feel you treat everyone the same but the amount of business a company does with a customer is bound to influence these decisions.

The value of a customer includes the value of his or her recent purchases, recurring purchases, and the amount of business that customer represents in the future. These are concrete values. Other things that should be taken into consideration would include the customer's ability to influence other people to do business with your company, word of mouth advertising, and the industry in which the customer is involved. (Can the customer help you obtain additional business within the customers industry?)

Here's an example:

A customer walks into a deli and buys a sandwich for \$4.00 and a drink for \$1.00. He goes back to his office and finds the sandwich is full of poor quality meat with lots of fat in it. He goes back to the deli and demands a new sandwich. The deli owner refuses and an argument starts. The deli owner says to himself; "This guy only spent 5 bucks. This argument is just not worth my time. Let him go somewhere else." He tells the guy to leave the deli.

What did the deli owner lose? The sandwich cost him \$2.00 to make so he saved \$2.00. He did lose a customer but that was only \$5.00 so no big deal.

Wrong! Let's look at things a different way. This customer eats lunch out twice a week. That's \$10.00 per week or \$520.00 per year. He also eats in an office with 20 other people that also eat out twice a week. He goes back and tells them how he was treated. Two more people decide they don't like that kind of treatment so they don't go back. That's  $520 \times 2$  or \$1020.00 more lost. So far the deli owner lost \$1560.00! The customer then finds a new deli that is looking to add customers. Their sandwiches are bigger and their prices are better. It's a bit of a drive but the switch is worth it so that one person is making the trip. Eventually the other people in the office see the bigger and better sandwiches and 5 more people switch. That's  $520 \times 5$  or \$2600.00. The deli owner has now lost \$3620.00 all because he chose to save \$2.00 on replacing a sandwich! What was the value of that customer? Was it \$5.00 or \$3620.00? Do you think the deli owner would have treated this customer just a little bit different if he had realized this customer's true value?

You may think this is funny or just plain outrageous but it can happen. I personally know a gentleman that owned an electronic repair business. One of his major accounts was a string of video stores. One store manager made an unreasonable request and this gentleman refused to honor the request because it would mean \$100.00 loss for something that was not his fault. The store manager found someone else to do his store repairs and eventually the new business took all the stores in that chain away. It can and does happen. Don't let it happen to you!

In the case of the deli above, who knows what other business may have been lost? Maybe the owner of the company would like to have some company meetings catered. Who do you think will get that business? There are also employee businesses such as Christenings, graduations, etc. that may require catering. All this needs to be figured into the equation.

In the case of service businesses, we must figure in the cost of service contracts, maintenance contracts, equipment purchases, life span of equipment, and one more big item: supplies. Supplies are important because they represent on-going or recurring revenue. The customer may buy a machine every five years but they will buy supplies every month. In most cases the profit on supplies is where the money is made! All these things must be considered when trying to establish the true value of the customer.

The next time you are talking with a customer, place a large value on him and see if you are willing to go the extra mile for him. I think you will be surprised how your attitude will change!

# Perception vs. Reality

We have talked about perception and reality a little bit and we will skim over it again here. Perception is what your customer thinks your business can and will do for him. This perception is based on events and experiences this customer has had or heard about your company.

You must deal with perception because, in your customer's mind, their perception is their reality! Two basic factors will determine someone's perception of your company: 1) past dealings and experiences, and 2) Future dealings and experiences.

Past dealings and experiences can be actual dealings the customer has had with your company or something that someone told him about your company. That can also include advertising, editorial content, newspapers, newscasts, or any media publicity. When you come down to it, that is the whole purpose of advertising, to alter your perception of a product or service. They take a product you care nothing about and try to convince you that you must have it now! Anything that has affected your customer in the past has helped shape that perception.

Future dealings and experiences will also effect that perception by altering the perception. A good experience will either reinforce previous good perceptions or negate some of the effects of a bad perception. A good experience can turn a "They're no good" into a "You know, they might just be all right" kind of perception. Just the opposite can also be true. A good perception can be blown out of the water by a single negative experience.

Think about that last statement. Year's worth of good things can be undone by a single bad experience. Sometimes this is true but other times the perception is just damaged. The stronger the perception, the harder it is to alter. We want to create the strongest positive perception possible!

Studies have estimated that it can take up to 10 good experiences to offset the effects of one bad experience! That is because the human mind tends to remember bad things more easily than we remember pleasant or unremarkable things. That is why people with bad experiences are far more likely to tell others or respond to customer service surveys.

The perception your customers have about your company will depend on how you treat your customers and the quality of the products and services you provide. Fail to address either of these items and you have a sure-fire recipe for failure.



## Establishing a "Comfort Zone"

The one-thing customers want most from a product and retail store is confidence. They want confidence in the product and confidence in whom they bought the product from. When people start to look into buying something, they generally look for four things. They look for an appropriate product, quality, security, and price. The order may differ depending on the product and person involved but these three items are in every buying decision.

Think about what you do when start to purchase something. What do you do first? You shop around. You look at what different brands of product are available to you and what features are available on which models. This helps you determine which products are appropriate for you. Without doing this, you may find out after you buy a product that it does not do what you need it to do. When this happens we get into returns and exchanges. This amounts to inconveniences to both the customer and the store where the item was purchased.

Next you are going to look at quality. Which brands are made better? Do some products look cheap compared to the others? You decide which product appears to be built the best. You may look at reviews in consumer magazines or rely on a recommendation of a friend. Whatever the source of the information, you are looking to establish which product has the best quality about it.

After you narrow down the selection process, you are going to look at the security aspect of the purchase. What stores offer me the best chance of getting help when there is a problem? More important, which stores WON'T give me help after the sale? Most people will not purchase anything of substantial value if they know the store where they bought it will not help them after the sale. When was the last time you saw a car commercial that said, "Buy your new car from us but if you have a problem later, go somewhere else to get it fixed!"? I'm sure you will never see that commercial on TV! More on security in just a little bit.

The last item on the list is price. Price often decides which product is going to be purchased. You may love that Porsche but can only afford that Chevy! Most people are restricted by a budget. They will choose the best product they can get within the budgeted amount.

These four items control how and where a purchase is made. All these items are used to establish a comfort zone in our customer's heads! This "comfort zone" allows us to feel secure in the purchase we made. It tells our brains that we used all available data when we made our decision. It convinces us that we should not blame ourselves if something goes wrong. In fact, it tells us that we have done everything we could to insure that things wouldn't go wrong.

For those of you that don't believe this train of thought, let me ask you a few questions?

Why do we pay more for name brands when we can buy store brands for less that are probably made by the same manufacturer that made the store brand?

Why do you pay more to buy something at another store just because you know they have a good reputation for dealing with their customers?

Why do we let advertising influence what we purchase and where we purchase it?

The one answer to all the above questions is that we make decisions that enable us to create our comfort zone. We make decisions so that we can feel comfortable with our purchase. No one says, "I think I will buy this cheap looking product from that store that has a bad reputation and I'll pay more for it, too!" That does not create a comfort zone!

(HINT: Important Concept in this next paragraph! Make sure you understand it!  
Read and re-read it until you commit it to memory!)

Always remember, the stronger the comfort zone is in your customer's mind, they more likely you are going to make the sale! The stronger the comfort zone concerning you, or your store, in the customer's mind, the more likely you are to keep him or her as your customer!

Everything we do in business is done to establish or increase this comfort zone!

Customer Service increases the comfort zone!  
Good Reputations increase the comfort zone!  
Quality products increase the comfort zone!  
Good service increases the comfort zone!  
Convenience increases the comfort zone!

Conversely, the things we try to avoid in business reduce or eliminate that comfort zone!

Poor service reduces the comfort zone!  
Bad reputation reduces the comfort zone!  
Inferior products reduce the comfort zone!  
Inconvenience reduces the comfort zone!

The objective of all Customer Service skills is to create as large a comfort zone as possible. The larger the comfort zone, the more tolerance the customer will have for actions that are not agreeable to the customer. For example:

A customer purchases a product from you and arranges to have it delivered. He has done so many times in the past and has not had any problems. An appointment is set and the truck breaks down. The customer waits home for the delivery that never comes. You call and inform him of the problem. Since this customer has not had this problem in the past, and has received good service from you, his comfort zone is quite high and he will likely believe what you tell him. That is not to say that he is not unhappy with you but he will be understanding.

Let's look at the same situation with no comfort zone. This same customer buys the same product and arranges to have it delivered. He has done this several times in the past and three times the delivery was not made on time. The only reason he purchased from you again is price. The truck breaks down and you call the customer. Do you think he is going to believe you this time? Not likely. This does not mean that you are not telling the truth; it means that your customer's comfort zone is so small that he has little or no faith in what you are telling him. His mind is telling him, "Look, they do this all the time. Their truck isn't broke, they just screwed up!"

A comfort zone is something that is built up slowly over time and can be destroyed in a matter of seconds! How do we establish a positive comfort zone? We do that by giving the customer what he or she wants. Now let's take a look at what our customers want from us when they come in to do business with us.

# Skills Our Customers Want

Most businesses invest heavily in product training. They teach us how the product works, what it is designed to do, what features it has, and what applications it was designed to handle. All this information is fine and necessary to support a product. What you may be surprised to learn is that these skills are not the majority of what our customers are looking for.

The skills customers look for are:

- Honesty
- Respect
- Friendliness
- Concern
- Timeliness
- Courteous
- Compassionate
- Accurate
- Technical or product knowledge

If you look at the above list, you will see that the vast majority of what the customer wants is Customer Service related skills. Let's look at them one by one:

**Honesty - Our** customers need and respect someone who is honest with them. Honesty is equated with caring and concern for the needs of others. If your customers get the feeling that you are just out to make a sale and earn a commission, you have lost credibility and will be lucky to sell anything/

**Respect** - Always remember what our customers represent to our business and to your job. Always show respect to customers no matter what the situation. Respect shows your customers that you appreciate their business and helps increase their comfort zones.

**Friendliness** - Have you ever tried to do business with someone with no personality that was interested in just selling you something as quickly as possible? That is just not the right atmosphere to make customers want to buy. People who are outgoing and friendly are able to establish a relationship with the customer and use that relationship to create sales. Take the time with your customers to establish this relationship. Remember that we want to create relationships that will lead to long term, repeat business.

**Concern** - Show concern for your customers. Take the time to ask the right questions and identify your customer's needs. Make sure they are buying a product that will do what they need. Don't assume that the choice of the

customer is necessarily correct. Point out any concerns that you have and recommend more appropriate products. Always give reasons for your statements and keep the customer informed.

**Timeliness** - Customers want service when it is promised. They also want to be served within a reasonable amount of time once they enter a store. Keep in mind that your customer's time is valuable also. Make every effort to get to the customer as quickly as possible and make a commitment to follow through on all promises made to customers.

**Courteous** - Courtesy indicates respect. Always be courteous when dealing with your customers. Do not use first names unless asked to. When couples are your customers, address both parties. Don't just talk to one or the other. Since both parties will take part in the decision making process, it would be foolish to risk alienating one of them now!

**Compassionate** - Showing compassion is one of the skills that many of us need to work on. When customers have a problem, they are looking for someone to solve that problem. They are also looking for someone to make them feel a little better also. Being compassionate and "holding their hands" through the process shows care and concern. This is especially true with older people.

**Accurate** - Customers want to feel that the information they have been given is accurate. Take the time to assure that you have your facts straight and your information accurate before making statements to the customer. If you are found to be incorrect, or have made commitments based on false information, your credibility will have suffered. Poor information can dramatically shrink a comfort zone immediately.

**Product Knowledge** - Make no mistake about it, product knowledge is important. If you don't have it, you run the risk of selling the wrong product to the customer. Keep in mind, however, that your customers will probably shop around or read magazines and product information to get this information. Information is widely available over the Internet and people are more informed than ever today. Get whatever product knowledge you can but do not forget the overwhelming importance of customer service skills. You can have all the product information in the world but if you can't communicate it effectively and get the customer in the mood to buy, you won't succeed!

# Listen, Listen, and Listen!

Listening skills are among the most important skills to learn in Customer Service. Our customers come to us with problems that need to be addressed and needs that have to be fulfilled. Our success depends on our ability to get the information required to properly identify these needs and address them.

Good listening requires not only an understanding of the words being spoken but also the emotions behind the words and reading between the lines to uncover hidden information. When dealing with people that are upset or emotional, it is critical that we be able to separate the emotions from the words.

Emotions are an important part of how we communicate with each other. Generally speaking, the more emotional we are when we speak, the more likely we are to say something that we do not mean, or say something inaccurately. For example, when we are angry, we will tend to speak louder and more forcefully. We will tend to exaggerate facts and overstate our reasons for being angry. This kind of state does not lend itself well to resolving problems or identifying the needs of a person.

Think about the last time you were angry with a spouse, friend, or co-worker. When things got really hot, did you say some things that you regretted when you calmed down? Probably. You probably made some statements that were unfounded or made the situation appear worse than it already was. Very rarely do we accomplish anything positive in an angry state. We'll talk more about this later.

The point I am trying to make here is that to effectively identify the underlying issues or needs of the customer, we have to look past the emotions and discover the real content of the conversation. Unfortunately, this requires experience to master. One cannot simply read about it and go out and do it. You need to learn by doing. A sort of on the job training, so to speak. What we will try and do now is give you a step-by-step procedure on how to effectively listen to a customer.

**Step 1: Greet the Customer** - By greeting the customer with a friendly greeting, you will be able to quickly determine whether or not this customer is in a normal or aggravated state. If the customer appears calm and relaxed, you can proceed with attempting to help the customer. If the customer appears angry or aggravated, you must make note of this in your mind and take steps to reduce, or eliminate, that anger.

**2. Ask How You Can Help** - Unless you can read minds, we have no idea what the customer needs until he or she tells us. Don't wait for a customer to tell you what they came in for, ASK THEM! Ask them if they need assistance. Ask them if they have any questions about a particular product they are looking at. Ask them if there is anything that you can help them with. However you phrase it, make yourself available to your customers. Don't wait for them to come to you, you approach them.

Let's take a moment to talk about the danger of taking this concept a little too far. We've all been in stores where we are "assaulted" by salespeople and clerks the moment we walk through the door. We are followed around by employees, constantly asked if we need help, and are made to feel uneasy in the process.

I like to use this rule of thumb: When a customer enters the store, give them a minute or two to get where they want to go. If they look confused, or like they need help, then approach them. Otherwise, give them a little space. When you do approach them, ask them politely if they need help. If they do want help, help them. If they decline, back off and leave them alone. Also, try and have a customer approached by only one person. No customer likes to have person after person asking him if they need help.

If someone declines your offer of assistance, try and help someone else. If no one else needs to be helped, stay in the area. Do not go off and hide! Make yourself available to those customers that declined your offer before but now have questions or need assistance in making a purchase.

**Step 3: Get to a Neutral State** - If the customer is in an angry state of mind, it will be difficult to get accurate and timely information from them. When you encounter this situation, you must get the customer to a neutral state. A neutral state is where the customer is calm and open to suggestions and questions.

This can be accomplished by letting the customer know that you have a sincere desire to help them and by taking charge of the problem. Let the customer talk about his or her problem. This accomplishes two things. First, it lets the customer "vent" his feelings and emotions. By letting the customer vent his or her feelings, you will reduce their anger levels and get closer to a neutral state. Second, when the customer vents his emotions, you will have the opportunity to pick up valuable information. While you must look past the emotions, sometimes the customer will say something during the conversation that will help you resolve the problem.

Reassure the customer that any problems he or she has had in the past will stop now that you have become involved. Many times we will deal with a customer that has had many frustrating experiences in the past that have

destroyed their trust in the product or your company. Reassurance is the first step to achieving a neutral state.

**Step 4: Ask Questions!** - Very few customers will just stand there and tell us everything we need to know to recommend the right product or make an informed diagnosis of a problem. Part of any good set of Customer Service Skills includes the ability to ask the right questions at the right time to ascertain just what it is that the customer is looking for or needs. If you ask the correct questions, you will be able to deliver to the customer the right combination of actions and benefits to make them happy.

Sometimes it is a natural reaction of ours to not want to ask questions. Sometimes, we are afraid of the answers! We may be dealing with an unreasonable customer and are afraid to open up another can of worms by asking probing questions. This is a mistake. Problems that exist now and are not resolved will only come up again in the future and the customer will probably be more upset then than they are now. By asking questions and uncovering new or different problems, you are helping to resolve these new problems before they become issues. You are also letting your customers know that you are looking out for their interests as well as the interests of your business.

Try and ask questions that have a real purpose. That is, ask questions that will point to information that will resolve the problem or eliminate possible solutions. Just as a technician will take measurements to reveal whether a circuit is working correctly, you must also "troubleshoot" your customer's problem in order to properly resolve it.

One word of caution: When you ask someone a question, give him or her time to answer it. Do not cut them off in mid sentence when you think you know what they mean. This is very frustrating and gives the customer the feeling that you do not care about what he or she has to say.

**Step 5: Make Your Customer Part of the Process!** Do you want a surefire way to increase your chances of satisfying your customers? Make them part of the decision making process. If your customer takes part in the decision-making, they are far more likely to be supportive with the outcome and satisfied with the result. Use a plan of attack such as, "Mr. Hubbard, there are two ways we can resolve this problem. Let me know which one would be best for you."

This is a very clever way of making the customer feel that he or she has communicated to you what they would like to see happen. When they pick the proposed plan of action, they will almost always be more satisfied with the outcome. Ask the questions and listen to the answers. Always remember that the best question in the world is meaningless if you don't take the time to listen to the answer!



## Customer Service Basics

Always pay attention to your customers when they are talking to you. If your customer gets the idea that you are not paying attention they will become angry and offended. Ignoring a customer is the same as ignoring their problems. The same problems they have brought to you to resolve.

Now that we know the importance of listening to our customers, we need to know how to communicate effectively with the customer. We do that by understanding just what it is our customers expect from us and what we must do when we speak to them.

# Talking To Customers

How we talk to our customers has a profound effect on the types of responses we will get. It is important to make every effort to put your customers at ease during your conversations. If any negative circumstances have preceded your conversation, take steps to resolve those issues, apologize for them, or do whatever seems prudent to minimize their involvement from this point on. As you recall, this is referred to as reaching a neutral state. By getting to a neutral state, you stand a much better chance of having a meaningful conversation where information is freely and accurately exchanged.

Always keep in mind who you are talking to and their ability to understand you when you talk. Most customers will not be familiar with technical terms or industry specific buzzwords. If you use these in your conversation, your customer will not understand you and will become frustrated. This kind of situation benefits no one. The use of technical terms in a conversation is called "techspeak". Try to avoid using techspeak whenever possible. If you happen to talk with someone that does understand, they will probably communicate that to you. When that happens, you can use technical terms but try not to get too complicated or involved in higher-level terms.

Another common mistake is that we tend to "talk down" to our customers. While this may not be intentional, it is a very dangerous thing to do to a customer.

While we want everyone to be able to understand us when we communicate, we must use words and terms that most everyone can understand. Avoid the use of long and fancy words when general words will do. Always talk to you customer not at them. Make them part of the conversation and do not give them the impression that you do not think they know what they're talking about. Above all, never give anyone the impression that you feel that you are better or smarter than they are. This attitude is usually met with a negative response and may doom you to failure. Here are some examples:

**Wrong:** Let me figure out how to explain this so even you can understand.

**Right:** This procedure can get a little involved. Let me walk you through it step by step so that you get comfortable with it.

**Wrong:** You still don't understand? All right, let's go through it again and maybe you'll get it this time.

**Right:** You're still having problems? I did too, when I first tried it. Let me explain it again and maybe we can find out where we went wrong.

If you noticed one common thread in the right answers above, it is that the customer is not blamed with their failure to accomplish something. In each of the responses, the customer is made to feel that he or she is not stupid, or incapable of learning something. Instead, efforts are made to deflect blame and concentrate on resolving the issues. Always remember that customer service is an area where we do not look to assess blame, but to satisfy a customer and retain their business. We do not look to win the battle but save the customer.

It is usually a good idea to explain to the customer why you need to ask certain questions and what benefits the customer will receive by answering them truthfully and honestly. Explaining this up-front will make the customer more responsive and willing to cooperate. You also take a step towards making the customer part of the decision making process. Here is an example on how to accomplish this:

"Sir, I am going to ask you a few questions that will help me determine exactly what is causing your problem. These questions will only take a few minutes and may help eliminate a return visit and save you time."

"Sir, I would like to ask you a few questions about your specific problem. They will only take a few minutes and will enable me to make sure that the technician brings the right parts with him when he comes to your home this Friday."

Always try to make and keep eye contact when you talk to someone. By looking someone in the eye while you talk, it shows that you are giving the person your complete attention. Everyone has had the experience of talking to someone while they are doing paperwork, talking on the phone, or otherwise occupying themselves with something while they are talking to you. This is very rude and should be avoided at all costs.

If you are busy, ask the customer to wait and tell him how long you will be. You and the customer will be better off than if you try to talk to him while doing something else. There is also another very important reason why you should make eye contact and give the customer your undivided attention.

Part of the communication process includes identifying a person's moods or feelings while you are talking. By looking the person in the eyes and concentrating on their facial expressions, you can see the early signs to anger or frustration. You can see when the customer becomes pleased or has a positive reaction. You can use all of this information to identify which direction the conversation should go at that point. Are you headed in the right direction? If the customer seems happy and content, keep following that course. If the customer seems to be getting a little concerned or uneasy, change your course and try to get the customer back on track.

Another important reason for giving your customer your total concentration is that the primary skill used in conversation is listening. How can you listen when you are concentrating on something else? You may miss a crucial piece of information!

As we have discussed, listening skills include not only listening to the words coming out of the person's mouth, but also identifying the emotions and hidden meanings behind those words. In order to do this quickly and effectively, you must devote your complete attention to the process. Failure to do so may cause you to miss some information, interpret the meaning wrong, or fail to identify the emotions or mental state of the person who is talking. Besides all of that, it's just plain rude!

If you don't believe that, or just don't think it really makes a difference, wait until the next time someone does it to you and see how you react! Your reaction may surprise or enlighten you!

### **Being Easy To Understand**

You may have the very best intentions in the word and the very best communications skills but if your customers cannot understand you, you will not be able to communicate effectively.

One of the things we must deal with as businesses or individuals in the world today are the increasing amount of different cultures and ethnic diversities present in every part of the world. Along with these different cultures, we have an entirely new set of accents and languages to deal with.

The type of business you are in, and the territory your business deals with, will determine what languages and cultures you will need to deal with. Your customers may speak different languages and you will need to have people available that know these languages in order to effectively help these customers resolve their problems. You cannot effectively communicate by using hand gestures and piecing together a conversation based on individual words or "sounds like" commentary. Even when people know how to speak English there is a problem that must be addressed.

This problem is delicate in nature but must be addressed, nonetheless. Accents make understanding some people extremely difficult. If a customer has to strain, or work, to understand what you are saying, this places a burden on the customer. This burden may be strong enough for a customer to search out alternative sources to do business with. In order to keep this situation from occurring, you should take some very basic steps.

1) Evaluate each and every person that has direct contact, or phone contact, with your customers. Ask yourself how they communicate with others. Are they easy to understand? Do they have god command of the language they use to communicate with your customers?

## Customer Service Basics

2) Provide training on increasing the communication skills of your workers or yourself. This may include speech training, language skills, or communication skills.

3) Monitor everyone that communicates with customers and continuously update training as required.

I do not want to give the impression that you should only hire a certain type of person in your business. What I am saying is that you need to take every step necessary to insure that you and your workers can easily communicate with your customers. Remember one thing, your customers have the option to deal with whatever businesses they wish. You do not have that luxury. You need customers to survive. Make sure you do whatever you need to keep your customers happy.

# How To Treat Customers - The Golden Rule

During the introduction of this manual, we stated that Customer Service skills are mostly just applications of common sense. Of all the skills discussed in this manual, none are as basic as "The Golden Rule!" We all learned in as far back as Kindergarten! We just have to remember and apply it!

For those of you that don't remember the golden rule, here is a refresher:  
**"Treat everyone as you would like to be treated"**

If anything defines Customer Service, this phrase does! It's a basic phrase that has such a powerful meaning; we often don't understand it until we look at it in detail. So, without further comment, let's dissect the Golden Rule as it applies to Customer Service.

Most of us want the same things when we deal with a company. We want to feel appreciated, get a good value for our money, and feel that we can depend on the company when we need support. Though there are other things we look for when we do business with a company, these three are the biggest factors. If a company provides us with these three things, chances are we will come back again and again.

Now let's take a look at what we look for in other parts of our lives. When we choose our friends or spouse, don't we look for people who we feel that we can depend on? People who make us feel wanted and appreciated? Of course we do!

When we apply for a job, we concentrate on the money aspect and also what it could mean in our career. Once we're on that job, what factors make us want to move on or stay with the same company? The same factors we just discussed! If we are paid at a level that we feel represents a good value for our efforts, we'll stay. If not, we start looking to move on. If we are made to feel that our efforts are appreciated by those around us, we will tend to stay. If we are made to feel inadequate or unimportant, chances are we will opt to leave. If we feel we can depend on our co-workers for help and support, we'll stay. If it's a cutthroat environment, we're outta there!

These feelings can get so strong that some people will sacrifice a little more money to keep a job that rewards them emotionally! Smart companies realize that if they keep their workers content, challenged, and fulfilled, they will have a much lower employee turnover rate. This represents a good business case for providing training and employee support.

At this point, we have established that we are really no different from the people that come to us for assistance. We both want the same things out of life and will react less than positively when we don't get what we feel we are entitled too. That is human nature. To succeed, therefore, we need to make people feel like we want to feel when we do business with someone. Another way of putting this is: "Treat everyone as you would like to be treated." Sound familiar?

You might be asking yourself, "How do I do that?" It's really very easy once you've practiced it a little bit. The one important thing you must do is learn to put yourself in the customer's place before you say or do anything. Ask yourself, "How would I react if someone just told me what I am going to tell this customer?" If your reaction is negative, try and reconsider your actions and see if you can come up with a different answer. Very often you can deliver the same message in a different way and make a customer more satisfied. By thinking how you would react, you can gauge whether or not what you are going to say is appropriate.

Another reason for looking within yourself before you act or speak is that you will come up with the solution that you might want if you were in the customer's position. If that particular solution is an option, why not just give the customer that option and see what the reaction is? You have nothing to lose and since you have already listened to the customer and judged what your reaction would be, you stand a good chance of being successful!

The last important reason for treating people the way you would like to be treated is that you cannot help but come across to the customer as being sincere in your efforts to resolve the problem. The customer will be more understanding and open to suggestion when he or she sees that you are honestly trying to help them.

We all tend to deal with adversity in different ways. Problems that we cannot solve will bother us to some extent. Here is one reason why following the Golden Rule will help you to deal with these kinds of situations and reduce your stress level.

If you are truly interested in providing world-class customer service, you want to help each and every customer with their problems and be successful 100% of the time. While this is an admirable goal, it is, nonetheless, unachievable. People are people and you are going to come up against people that you are not going to be able to satisfy no matter what you do. This is just a fact of business that is sometimes hard to accept.

If you treat everyone like you would like to be treated, you can honestly look within yourself as that angry customer leaves and say to yourself, "I did as good a job as I could. That person just can not be satisfied." Not only can you

say that to yourself, you will believe it in your heart. Why? Because you looked within yourself, knew what you were proposing was fair, and understood that this customer was being unreasonable in their demands. It is far easier to deal with this type of failure than to fail when you know that you put little effort into a particular customer.

This is not to say that every time someone does not agree with your proposal that you should label them a "malcontent" and make no further efforts to satisfy them. What we do mean is that, when you have given your best, you should be able to walk away with your pride and feeling intact. You may even learn from the situation and be able to handle it just a little bit better next time!

Think about how you can use this simple but powerful rule in not dealing with customers but with co-workers, salespeople, friends, and spouses. You may think it's common sense and maybe, just maybe, a little corny! Take my word for it, however. Live according to this rule and you are well on your way to providing the level of Customer Service that you and your company should be committed to!



# Be Positive!

I'd like to take a minute to take a little audience participation now. It will only take a moment. Everyone reading this manual that likes to be told "No!" or "I can't do that!" please raise your hand. I thought so. Nobody likes to be told "No!"

Have you every taken the time to think about how you react to certain words? We're not talking off-color language or risqué words, just normal, run of the mill, common words. We usually don't give much thought to the words we use and hear, but it is important to choose our words carefully.

In order to understand why we must choose our words carefully, we must understand how our minds react to certain types of words or phrases. The way our minds react determines what our reactions will be. Therefore, if we use the right words, or refrain from using the wrong words, we can greatly improve our chances of success.

The primary focus of determining what words to use in Customer Service situations is to avoid using "negative" words. Negative words are words that convey negative thoughts or images. Words such as can't, won't, not, against, etc. all convey the impression that the customer is not going to get what he or she is asking for. This impression will create a less than positive attitude in the mind of the customer. This attitude will hamper a constructive conversation.

How do we limit the use of negative words? Well, sometimes it is not possible to totally eliminate the use of negative words. Eventually, you are going to have to say "no" to a customer every now and then. The key is to delay the use of these words as much as possible. To accomplish this, we need to take some phrases that we use every day and "re-engineer them" to avoid using negative words. Here are some examples:

Wrong: "I can't do that."

Right: "What I can do for you is....."

Wrong: "That is against our company policy."

Right: "One option available to you is....."

(Keep in mind that your customers do not care at all if something is against your company policy. All they know is that they are not getting what they want. Avoid saying something is against company policy. Usually, this just makes things worse.)

What we try to do is express everything from a positive point of view. Instead of telling a customer what you can't do, tell them what you can do. Don't

tell him what is against your policy; tell them what options are available to them. Always make every statement from the positive point of view. Letting your customers know what you can do leads them to believe that you are making an honest effort to resolve the situation. Telling them what you can't do lets the customer know that you have little interest in resolving the situation to the customer's satisfaction.

We have discussed the comfort zone and it's importance to resolving Customer Service situations. The words we use and how we use them influences our comfort zone dramatically. As you might guess, negative words reduce the comfort zone while positive words increase our comfort zone! How would you feel, as the customer, after this conversation with a Customer Service person?

You: "The new VCR I bought here doesn't work. I would like a new one."

Clerk: "I'm sorry. I can't give you another one."

You: "Okay. Just give me my money back, then."

Clerk: "I'm sorry. I can't do that. It's against company policy."

You: "Well, I need this unit fixed. Please fix it and notify me when it's done."

Clerk: "I'm sorry, we don't do repairs."

You: "What am I supposed to do?"

Clerk: "Why don't you try contacting the manufacturer? The numbers somewhere in your owner's manual. Have a nice day!"

Chances are you would be pretty upset and frustrated at this point. Not only did you not get a resolution to your problem, the clerk was of little help. He or she showed absolutely no inclination to want to resolve your problem. Could this have been handled better? How about this:

You: "The new VCR I bought here doesn't work. I would like a new one."

Clerk: "What seems to be the problem? Maybe I can help you straighten this out"

You: "It just will not playback. I just get a blank screen. Can I get another unit or just get my money back?"

Clerk: "Why don't we do this? There is an authorized repair center in town. I will call them and let them know about your problem. I'll have them go over the whole unit and make sure that everything is perfect. Sometimes this is a blessing in disguise. Having everything checked out sometimes uncovers a hidden problem that might not show up until after warranty. Would you like to drop it off on your way home? It's on the way?"

## Customer Service Basics

You: "I guess I could drop it off but I really don't want to wait for a repair."

Clerk: "I'll call them and ask them to look at it right away. We send them a lot of business and I'm sure we can speed up the process for you."

You: "All right. I guess we can give it a try."

Clerk: "I'll call them right away and let them know you're on your way. Here's my card with my name and extension number on it. If you have any questions or problems with this, just give me a call. Thank you for the opportunity to help you."

Compare this conversation with the previous one. Which one makes you feel better as a consumer? Obviously the second one. Everything was done with a positive "spin". We actually got the customer to take the unit in himself instead of having the store do it! Suppose the clerk said, "There is an authorized repair center in town but you'll have to take it there. We don't do that." Do you think the customer would have been as agreeable or cooperative? Probably not.

Customer Service is not a win - lose situation. The most effective resolutions are where the customer is satisfied and the business acts within their established guidelines and policies. This is called a win-win situation. Win-win situations are what we should strive for every day of our Customer Service lives. Remember that winning a particular situation may result in the customer refusing to do business with your company ever again. Don't jeopardize this relationship for the ability to claim that you won a single battle. In these cases, you win the battle but lose the war!

# The Importance of the First Contact

It is hard to overestimate the importance of the first contact you make with another person. That first contact is responsible for the initial impression that person has of you. If you impress the person in a positive way, the other person will be more responsive to what you have to say and the ideas and solutions that you come up with. If your first impression is less than positive, your ideas and efforts will become suspect in the eyes of the other party.

Because the first impression is so important, let's examine what goes into that first impression and how to maximize your chances of success!

## Appearance

Whether you like it or not, your appearance is what the customer notices far before anything else. It may not be fair, or politically correct, but people judge each other initially on appearance. The only exception to this is when the first contact is not made face to face. This contact might be over the phone, via e-mail, or letter. Face to face contact is the most common in retail customer service situations.

Do not get the impression that in order to make a favorable impression we must all dress in three piece suits. A more specific way of looking at our appearance is that it **should be appropriate for the business or industry that we are working in.**

For example, nobody expects to have their auto mechanic service their car wearing a suit and tie. In this job, typical dress would be a uniform or shirt and pants on a dark color that would "hide" some of the everyday grease and grime. If a mechanic did do his everyday work in a three-piece suit, this would only be part of some "gimmick" or promotional program.

This is not to say that the mechanic should not be somewhat presentable and well groomed. Regardless of the work someone does, they can be clean-shaven, or have their beard well trimmed. They should not be overly dirty and their personal hygiene should be well maintained. It's all right to be covered in grease and grime. It is not all right to be a slob!

Let's look at another situation. Let's say you go to the local beach and go into a surf shop to buy a bathing suit. The clerk behind the counter is wearing

shorts and a T-shirt with a sunscreen manufacturer logo on it. How would you feel about that? You probably would not notice the type of dress because it is totally appropriate for the type of environment in which the person works. Unless the person had a three-day growth of beard or very poor hygiene practices, you would not notice a thing.

Now we leave the surf shop and drive home. On the way home we stop at the office of a financial planner that we heard about from an ad in the local paper. We go in to the office and the secretary leads us into his office and says that he will be with us in just a few moments. A few minutes later, a man walks in wearing shorts and a T-shirt with a sunscreen manufacturer logo on it. He sits down at his desk and asks you how he can help you. What is your reaction to his appearance?

If you are honest, you will find yourself a little "taken back" with this man's appearance. He may be well groomed and have impeccable personal hygiene, but his choice of dress is not appropriate for someone in his position. When you go to a financial planner, you expect to see someone in a suit and tie, or at least a dress shirt and pair of dress pants. After all, this is a person that you are thinking about trusting with your life savings and your retirement! Would you do that with someone in shorts and a T-shirt? Most people definitely would not!

I realize that this is not fair. In no way does how a man or woman dresses effect how competent they are in doing their job. Clothes are just a visual item that in no way reflects on a person's ability to get the job done and do it right! What outward appearances do, however, is either inspire confidence or raise suspicion.

A very big part of Customer Service is to get other people to trust in you and your ability to resolve issues quickly, fairly, and correctly. Anything that gets in the way of people developing confidence in you should be dealt with quickly and decisively. If you find that dressing in an appropriate manner for your particular situation is upsetting to you, or creates problems for you, you should consider changing your position or industry.

It is not reasonable to expect people to put their own private views, and even prejudices aside just because you want them to. Remember your customers have the option to do business anywhere they please. It is you and your company that needs to keep them. Not their responsibility to keep doing business with you.

I don't want to give the impression that you must take steps to deal with prejudice on a daily basis. Prejudice of race, color, or creed has no place in the workplace or any other place. Prejudice as we are referring to it would be something that a particular part of society may have with your industry. For example, if your business caters to older people, they may feel uncomfortable

with men with long hair or very young salespeople. This has nothing to do with the qualifications of the individuals involved but rather with the viewpoints and attitudes of your customer base.

While we do not condone discrimination in any shape or form, we must realize that our people must look and act appropriately. Just as you would not hire an obese person to work in a weight loss center, or a bald man to work in a hair replacement clinic, we must take steps to insure that our employees, and those being considered for employment, fit the profile for a particular job.

Like it or not, we must take into consideration the attitudes and environment of our industry and establish a code of appearance that will inspire confidence and allow people to function without additional barriers to overcome.

### **Targeting Your Emotional State**

After your appearance, the next thing the other person notices is your demeanor or emotional state. They look for a smile or a frown or other outward indications of what state you are in.

Your mood, or emotional state, will have a major impact on how effective you are in dealing with your customers. In general the more upset you are the less effective you will be. There are many reasons for this.

First of all, emotions influence how we look at things throughout the day. They influence how we react and how we think. If you approach a situation upset or angry, your level of tolerance and patience will be severely reduced or eliminated altogether. Think about the last time you were upset and a friend or co-worker asked you something and you jumped all over them. Why did you react that way? You reacted that way because of the feelings and emotions present inside you when that person spoke to you.

The same thing will hold true in Customer Service. If you just get done dealing with the customer from hell, you will approach the next customer with some negative feelings unless you are very careful to get to a neutral state.

As we have already talked about, a neutral state is an emotional state where you can effectively deal with customers or other people. In this state you will be able to effectively listen and converse without the "emotional baggage" of previous or external factors.

### **Separate Your Business Life From Your Personal Life**

You must understand that the emotions from your personal or private life have no place affecting your business life. Your customers should not have to deal with your personal problems or have them get in the way of making the very best decision possible. In order to accomplish this, you must make an effort to leave those emotions home when you leave for work. This is not always as easy as it may seem.

Personal emotions are part of us. There are times when we are almost consumed by personal or private matters. It may be a fight with a spouse, or maybe a medical problem with our family or loved ones. When we have these situations to deal with, these emotions tend to consume our minds virtually all the time.

It sometimes is effective to use the time we spend commuting to work to try and remove ourselves from the things that are bothering us and "get into business mode". Use this time to listen to music or something else that you get pleasure from and does not require concentration or extreme effort. For some of us, reading a book may do the trick but this requires concentration and can let our mind wander back to our private problems. Singing along with your favorite tape or CD tends to work quite well.

What you are trying to accomplish is to develop a routine where you can separate your personal life from your business life. When you walk into the door you are in business mode. You can function effectively and provide the very best customer service to you customers. If you can train yourself to do this, you will reduce your overall stress in your life, improve your performance, and make yourself more valuable to your company and your customers.

For those of you that do not think this is that important, I ask you to close your eyes and think of these two times like these in your lives:

1) You've had a day in which everything has gone in your favor. You hit every green light, your horse won at the track, the boss told you that you are doing a great job and gave you a raise. You came home and found that your son made the honor roll, and that your wife had just won a free vacation for two to Hawaii.

2) You hit every red light on the way to work and you were late because you had to change a flat on the side of the expressway. Your boss told you that you had better do better because there are layoffs in the works and they are only going to pick those who can perform at a higher level. You go home and find that your kids were suspended from school for fighting and your wife has to have \$10,000 worth of dental work, none of which is covered by your insurance.

Which day do you think you would be more effective? Which day would you tend to want to do your very best? Which day would you have the most patience? If you had to deal with you on either one of those days, which day would you choose?

Generally speaking, the more positive the mental state of a person, the better that person will function at any given time. The exact opposite is also true. The more negative the mental state, the least effective a person will be. Because of this, we will have to become more aware of our mental state and take steps to stabilize it.

We have already talked about using the time to and from work to get to a neutral or positive state. What happens when something occurs in the middle of the day that puts us in a negative mood? We can't wait for the end of the day, or

even until our lunch hour, to take steps to recover. What we can do is learn how to deal with these situations.

When we find ourselves in a bad situation, we want to make sure that we do not let our emotions carry over into the next customer. What you want to try to do is to take a moment and get your self together. It is a good idea to take a minute or two to get you back to a neutral state. Go into the stockroom and take a few deep breaths. If you are in an office building, take a brief walk around the building or floor and get yourself back in control. This time, if not abused, is very well spent. If you do not get yourself back together, think of what may happen.

Failure to distance you from bad situations will adversely affect your success rate. If you have a bad customer experience and you let it carry over to the next customer, you run the risk of making the situation worse. You will be short tempered with the next customer and may cause irreparable damage that customer relationship.

When you are dealing with the first contact with a customer, bad or negative emotions will be present in the perception or you in the eyes of the customer. They will tend to view you as a negative person that is not very desirable to do business with. Since you may never get a second chance to show that customer that you are a good person to deal with, you take every precaution to make sure that first contact is the best it can possibly be.

### **FOLLOW-UP!**

Again, follow-up is crucial for world-class customer service. If you are involved in the first contact situation with a customer, always make sure that you follow-up until after the situation has been resolved. When it has been fully resolved, make one more contact to close the issue for good.

Follow-up means keeping the customer informed every step of the way. If a part or item has to be ordered, let the customer know how long it will take. If that time elapses and the item still has not arrived, call the customer and let him know you have not forgotten about them. The vast majority of the time all that customer's want is to be kept informed on what is going on. Failure to follow-up will cause customer satisfaction to fall dramatically.

Another reason for follow-up is that sometimes the best-laid plans go bad. Follow-up will alert you to problems much faster. If an order is lost, follow-up will reveal that quickly, sometimes before the customer is even aware of it. Follow-up can also let you know when additional or new problems come up. Remember, you want to do everything you possible can to make that customer happy. That means resolving all past, current, and future problems or needs. Fail to do that and you are looking at an ex-customer!

Consider follow-up as another tool in your customer service toolbox. It could even be your biggest and most effective tool so USE IT!



# Unique Selling Position

One aspect of Customer Service that I would like to touch briefly on is identifying your Unique Selling Position. Your unique selling position is what you can offer your customers that are different than your competition. In reality, it is why people choose to deal with you, or hire you, instead of someone else.

We have already talked about the importance of being able to offer your customers something that is bigger, better, or less expensive than what they could get from anyone else. The difference between you and your competition may be the difference between success and failure.

Many businesses market their customer service to help define part of their unique selling position. "We stand behind our product", the service doesn't stop after the sale", and other marketing slogans inform the customer that you and your company take an aggressive stance toward customer service. They realize the importance of customer service and use it to sell more products and to get new customers.

If you, or your company, intend to use customer service as part of your unique selling position, keep one thing in mind. When you focus somebody's attention on something, you must deliver more than what the person expects to be successful. If your customer service is less than spectacular, it may be a better idea to focus on improving it before focusing someone's attention on it.

Make sure that all your internal procedures and measures are intact and functioning as intended. Make update-training part of your requirements for every employee. Make sure that everyone has a clear and focused outlook regarding customer service. Define your company's views on customer service and promote those views among all employees.

Customer Service can be a great sales tool for you and your company. Knowing how to promote your skills, and the skills of those around you, is a wonderful way to increase your productivity, earning power, and career advancement.

# The Limitations on Great Customer Service

Right now you may be thinking of all the ways you can make someone happy. You are thinking about changes in rules or procedures, changes in outlook, and maybe even taking a lot of seminars, courses, and other self-improvement items. If that is your thinking at this moment, Congratulations! We've got you on board and on the way to improving and implementing your new skills.

It is important that we consider that every action we take has a cost associated with it. Whatever settlement we may make with a customer will cost the company in time, product, or cash. Because of this, we want to remain cost effective when thinking how we can go about increasing our customer service performance.

## **Make sure the settlement is cost effective!**

In theory, we should treat everyone the same. In reality, however, we tend to treat those customers who buy a lot just a little better. The bottom line is that the more a person buys from you, the more valuable that customer is. Because of this, the more valuable the customer, the more money and resources you can spend to keep them happy. Let's look at this a little more closely.

Two people come in to your store with the same complaint. One buys \$100,000 of product from you each year and the other buys \$100.00 per year. Naturally, you try to make both customers happy and satisfied. In this case, however, both customers demand a particular settlement that will cost your company \$1,000.00 in product, time, and resources. This settlement is above what is covered by any warranty or requirements under the law. What do you do?

If it costs your company \$1,000 to save a \$100,000 account, you would probably do it and feel that this course of action was justified. After all, your mark-up on the goods and services you will sell to this customer will allow you to recoup all of your cost within less than a year. In cases like these, the money is well spent.

In the other case, unless there were other circumstances involved, it just does not make sense to spend \$1,000 to make a customer that spends \$100 happy. The cost greatly outweighs the value of the relationship.

These situations require thought and good judgement. You must always take into consideration the value of the customer and your company's policy and guidelines. Remember we talked about knowing the value of your customers? Make sure that you have a full understanding of what each of your customers represents to you and your company.

In order for any individual, or employee, to make informed decisions about resolving issues such as these, it is crucial that the company establish specific guidelines pertaining to cost of settlements. Since these guidelines will vary from company to company, it is not possible to make a hard and fast rule on how much to spend in every situation. Factors such as the size of the company, its financial condition, and the company's focus are all contributing factors. The final factor might even be which specific customer you are dealing with.

Please realize that we are not dealing in a perfect world when we do business. It is not possible to treat everyone exactly the same. Just as each person is different, each customer's value to your company is different. Learn to evaluate each situation separately by taking the following into consideration:

- 1) The cost of resolving the issue.
- 2) The value that the customer represents to your company.
- 3) Your individual company's policies, views toward customer service, and past actions in similar situations.
- 4) The specific customer involved.
- 5) What will happen if the situation is not resolved?
- 6) What may be gained by resolving the issue now and learning how to avoid the same situation in the future?

Sometimes we may "bite the bullet" to resolve an issue quickly. It may be a very sensitive issue such as the potential for injury or physical harm. In cases like these, it is often not possible to wait for someone to come up with a decision. Prompt action is mandated.

While quick action often can reduce the cost of resolving the issue, it sometimes can set a dangerous precedent. For example, if you handle a situation by agreeing to something that is usually outside of normal company policy and guidelines, people may expect the same treatment the next time. (Don't forget there are always exceptions to every rule. We call go outside guidelines once in a while. Guidelines are just what their name implies, a guide for determining your course of action.)

If you have to go beyond normal and customary, make sure your customer knows what you are doing and why. Make sure they understand that this is not covered under any warranty or normal business practice. Let them know why you are doing what you are doing and make it clear that they should

not expect the same outcome in the future. (Use your customer service skills to soften this message!)

The reasons for this are two-fold. First, if you are in this situation it is because you have decided that this customer should get something that he or she is not entitled to. The reasons for the decision are not important. What you want to avoid is having the same situation come up again and having the customer demand the same treatment again. If this does happen, you can remind the customer of the special circumstances that caused you to make your original decision. If you had discussed them with your customer, they cannot say they were not informed.

Second, and even more important, if you offer one person something, others may demand the same treatment. People talk to each other. They will share their experiences. It is not uncommon for someone to say, "I went over to XYZ Department stores today and they gave me a new unit for 75% off even though my unit was two years out of warranty. Take yours back and ask for Joe. He's the guy that gave it to me!" What is wrong with this picture?

The first customer may have represented a special case for your company. Perhaps this customer buys a lot of merchandise from you each year or has a special relationship with your company. In this case the resolution is just a good use of company funds. The person he talks to may have a totally different relationship with the company. Maybe that person never buys anything from you. He represents very little value to the company. Do you offer him the same resolution as the customer that does a lot of business? Of course not!

All businesses, no matter how large or small, have a limited amount of resources. In order for a company to be successful, these resources must be used where they will do the most good. How well these resources are used will determine the overall profitability of the company. Because of this, we must make different decisions based on individual criteria. It is not fair and often it just doesn't feel right. Always keep in mind that our job is to satisfy our customers within the guidelines set by our company. These guidelines are determined by factors that will help insure the long-term success of your company. Use exceptions carefully and wisely and you will increase your success rate in resolving issues and problems.

### **Legal Issues**

Often there will be cases where there is a potential for a problem to go to litigation. In other instances there may be an issue as to who is responsible for the damages. If you come up against any of these situations, it is important that you contact your manager or legal representative immediately and before you make any comment or offer.

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You must also keep this in your mind when you are talking to the customer and also before making any offer to the customer. The very act of making an offer to resolve the issue may actually work against you if the issue goes to court. The very act of making an offer may be interpreted as an admission of responsibility on your part. Since the damages involved could go into the millions of dollars in some cases, it is best to act on the safe side and ask for help and guidance.

For more information on this topic, and for specific legal guidance, please contact your manager or legal council.

# The Customer Is Not Always Right!

For the sake of this topic, I am going to make the assumption that your company has policies in place to satisfy any customer that has a legitimate complaint or problem. I am also going to assume that your company has a sincere desire to provide world-class customer service to its customers. If this is not the case, I recommend that your company revise its policies and then read this chapter.

Remember hearing the phrase "The customer is always right!" I don't know who said it first, but that person surely was not in customer service! At least not a person that was in direct contact with customers on a daily basis! While the vast majority of customers are justified in their requests or demands, there is a small percentage that has demands, which will exceed anything even close to rational thought. While you may not be able to satisfy these customers, the way you handle them may aid you in keeping that customer from going to your competition.

It is important to try and determine just why a customer is demanding a specific resolution. Have they been frustrated time and time again in the past? Have they made attempts to resolve the issue but those attempts fell on deaf ears? If that is the case, their frustration may have led them to "shoot for the moon" because they feel they are entitled to something for all their time and effort. In some cases, they may be right! If this is your situation, you may want to bend the rules a little and see what you can do for this customer. This could be an opportunity to rescue a customer. By treating this customer with respect, and making an honest attempt to address their concerns, you may just show this customer that you care and keep their business! Think of this as a customer service opportunity.

There is another group of customers, however, that are just plain unreasonable! Some customers just want to see how much they can get, how far they can go, and how much pain and suffering they can inflict on a person or business in the process. These people, if you identify them early enough, are somewhat easier to deal with!

When you encounter unreasonable people, you must make every effort to satisfy them. Use whatever weapons are at your disposal. Make a fair offer, follow your procedures, and act within established company guidelines. If these

actions do not bring about a resolution to the problem, take a step back and examine the situation. Ask yourself these questions:

- 1) Is the dialogue you've been having a give and take conversation or is the customer telling you what their demands are and not moving from those demands?
- 2) How extreme are the demands the customer is making?
- 3) Has the customer explained his or her position to you or are they just continuing to make demands?
- 4) If you agree to something, does the customer then increase their demands further?
- 5) Does the customer appear to really want the problem to be resolved?

The answers to these questions will lead you to one of two conclusions. You will either renew your efforts to resolve the situation or you will determine that you have done the best you can and will stop trying to negotiate a settlement.

It is important to remember that you cannot expect to have 100% satisfaction in customer service. There are people out there who actually enjoy fighting with businesses just to see how much they can get. They are never satisfied and it is almost a game for them. These customers are not assets to your business. Unless they purchase a phenomenal amount of product from you, or have ties to a great deal of other business within your company, these customers may not be worth expending company assets on.

The key to your long-term success in Customer Service is to have realistic expectations of yourself and your customers. Realizing that you will not be successful every time has two effects on your mental state. First, realizing that you will sometimes fail will help you "keep your edge" and not get too cocky or over-confident. Second, your acknowledgement that it is all right to fail once in a while will help you reduce your stress level. Insisting on 100% success is a noble, yet unattainable, goal. To keep your stress level down, and to improve your daily mental state, I urge you to follow this simple rule:

"If you can confidently say to yourself "I did my very best to resolve this situation and used every resource available to me." Then you should be able to chalk the "defeat" up to an unreasonable customer and move on.

Do not use this as an excuse to give up on every irate customer that walks through the door. Make every effort possible to resolve any and all problems you

may come in contact with. Do your best and make an honest effort to satisfy the customer. There are three reasons for doing so.

First, by doing your best, you will be able to move on to the next situation without being bothered or upset at your perceived "failure." Second, by doing your best, you may find out that you have made headway with a customer that you thought was unreachable. Often, when treated correctly, the hardest customers will soften up a bit and become salvageable. The third reason, and possibly the most important, is that your actions, statements, and conduct may be brought into play if the matter should go to a lawsuit.

Sometimes people will take you or your business to court to force a resolution. During the lawsuit, the customer's problem, and your efforts to resolve it, will be inspected in detail. If you show your efforts to be extremely fair and sincere, you will stand a better chance of being vindicated of any wrongdoing. By showing that you made several offers of settlement that were refused, your company will be seen as people who made good faith efforts and it will look like the customer was the one standing in the way of a resolution. Sometimes this can be the difference between victory and defeat.

### **Fallout!**

Fallout is what occurs when failing to satisfy a customer. The dissatisfied customer may be determined to spread the story to newspapers, friends, relatives, etc. Often, the first stop they will make is your competition. If this occurs, it is critical that you and your company have taken the necessary steps to resolve the situation. You cannot keep a disgruntled customer from talking, but you can limit the damage they may do by demonstrating to your customers that you are a business that deals with all its customers in a caring and sincere manner.

Often, a customer will threaten lawsuit at some point during the conversation. Some people will lead off with this statement while others will wait even until the end to play this card. Do not be intimidated by this statement. People think the threatening of taking someone to court will result in the caving in of the company. Do not let this happen! Filing a lawsuit takes three things that most customers do not want to commit: Time, effort, and money. It takes time to meet with the lawyer and file the papers. Also, the trial itself will take time away from the customer. Second, there is a lot of effort that goes into a lawsuit. Third, lawyers cost money! Unless this is an injury lawsuit that is taken on a contingency basis, the customer will have to put up their own money to bring a lawsuit to the courts. In most cases, the cost of such a suit will be equal to or more than the expected settlement!

If it appears that the threat of a lawsuit is real, distance yourself from the situation and inform the necessary people in your company about the



## Customer Service Basics

information. In some cases, it is a good idea to refrain from additional comments or actions until you are instructed as to what you should or should not say.

## Keeping Disputes Private!

When disputes do arise, try and hold your discussions in an area as private as possible. There are two reasons for this. First, in a private area, you can talk one on one and have a conversation without interruptions and interference. If there are other people around, the customer may refuse to back off their position because they may feel foolish in front of other people.

The second reason is that you do not want other customer to hear about any complaints that other customers may have with your company. Some customers will often pick the busiest time for voicing their complaints because they want a lot of people around to hear it. They feel that you will do whatever you can to shut them up and get them out of the store. There is some validity to this thought process because they know that you do not want to have other customers hear the details of any complaints.

If you can, try and handle complaints somewhere that is relatively isolated from the main area of the store. The worst place is near a counter or register where people routinely wait to check out or get assistance. When people are waiting, they are always looking for something to do with their time. If you are engaged in an argument with a customer, you can be assured that everyone waiting will be all ears! Handle all discussions, arguments, and offers where other people are not likely to hear.

I realize that it is not possible to have an office or room for these discussions. Though it is desired to have a private room, you can designate an area where little foot traffic is expected. This may be a counter just for Customer Service issues or problems. If this is not possible, designate an area where customers are led to have their problems addressed. If your customer objects to this, they have reasons for wanting to be in front of other people. Do not let your customers win this "game."

Another thing you want to discourage is the use of shouting or loud language. The rule is, the louder the language, the more people will hear. It is in your best interest to keep the volume down to a normal level. Another reason to stop people from shouting is that people do not communicate clearly when they are shouting. Emotions get in the way of meaningful dialogue. Very little gets accomplished when people talk in heated terms.

# Think of Customer Service Problems as Opportunities!

Now that you have the basic skills necessary for giving your customers world-class customer service, all that you need are the final two pieces to your Customer Service puzzle.

The first key is how you approach your job as a Customer service professional. If you approach your job as if you are going to deal with angry people all day long and that it's your job to make them go away, you will not have a lot of success or rewards. In order to be effective you need to change your outlook and how you feel about your job.

If you look at your job as a way of making a difference in the way your company does business, you will be more successful. I am not asking you to convince yourself that you are something that you're not. In reality, your position is of great importance to your company. You are the one that meets the customer face to face or over the phone every day! Your customers don't meet the president or CEO every day. They meet YOU! You are what your customers judge the company on. The product itself and how you interact with them. Because of this, your position in the company is a critical one. I think it's about time that everyone in Customer Service realizes just how important he or she are.

Think differently about the problems you face every day! Consider this:

Every problem is:

- 1) A chance to show every customer how much you appreciate his or her business and patronage.
- 2) A chance to create a solution that the customer will tell their friends, co-workers, and neighbors about! Talk about word of mouth advertising!
- 3) A chance to show just how good you and your company are!
- 4) A chance to let your customer know how much better you are than your competition!
- 5) A chance to renew that faith that brought the customer to your company in the first place!

Problems are opportunities! Think about them in that context and you will increase your skills in dealing with them. People tend to react better to something that they feel is positive in nature and avoid things that appear negative. By thinking about problems as solutions, you will react better and become more adept at resolving situations and problems.

### **How Do I Change My Skills?**

The second, and final, piece to your puzzle is how do you change your skills and implement the new ones?

First, do not try to change everything over night. Take a good look at your current skills and try to pinpoint the areas that need the most improvement. Is it your greeting? Changing your state of mind? Listening Skills? Whatever area you come up with, identify the skill or skills involved and try to change **one of them at a time**. If you try to change everything at once you will have little chance of success and the changes will be temporary.

Work on one new skill at a time. When you become so used to the change that you are doing it automatically without giving it any effort or thought, proceed to the next skill. What you are doing in this manner is building a firm foundation on to which you will be adding additional skills. This had proven to be the most effective way of learning.

If you are not sure of the areas in which you need improvement, ask a co-worker or boss. They will give you feedback. You could even try videotaping yourself and see how you look and act when you are talking to others. Whatever means you use make sure you take the time to accurately determine where you need to act. A little time and effort now will save hours of time later on.

### **Conclusion**

I can't say enough about those people who realize the importance of keeping their Customer Service Skills current. You deserve a lot of credit for taking the time to read this publication and for making the effort to change. The next part is the fun part. Take your time and use the techniques discussed in these pages. See what works for you and what doesn't work. Refine your skills.

Use the blank pages on the back of these pages. They have been left blank for a reason. Write down your notes, comments, ideas, and anything else that you feel is appropriate. Use these notes as a continuing resource to guide you on your way.

Above all, stick with it and show your customers just how good you are!

**For more information  
on Customer Service Training, please go to:**

**<http://www.customerservicetraininginstitute.com>**