



The Customer Service Training Institute

www.customerservicetraininginstitute.com

Customer Service Training For Service Technicians

Introduction

Customer Service skills are important to any job that requires contact with customers. We all know the importance of customer satisfaction as it pertains to growing our business year after year.

When we think about customer service, we usually think about the lady or gentleman behind the Customer Assistance desk or refund counter. While this is definitely a place for top-notch customer service skills, this is just one of the many places where customer service skills play an important role in how our customers feel about us and our companies.

The fact remains that everyone, regardless of their skill level or place in the company, requires a solid set of customer service skills in order to function at the peak of their potential. Top-notch customer service skills enable us to resolve problems faster and cheaper than our unskilled counterparts. Customer Service skills teach us to think "outside the box" when looking for solutions to our problems. It doesn't matter what solution we arrive at. The only thing that matters is that we satisfy the customer and get him or her to buy from you again and again.

Almost every well known company has recognized the need for Customer Service Training for their employees. The problem that remains, however, is that companies still limit this training to certain segments of their workforce. For example, cashiers might get the training while office personnel do not. This is a grave mistake. As you

may already know, the entire process of customer service is only as strong as its weakest link. In this example, let's say the cashier does her job and turns the problem over to someone in the office to process a refund. If that office person does not have the proper skill level, then the whole process could easily fail at that point. Everyone needs customer service training in order for a company to have the best chance in improving customer satisfaction.

One of the most frequently overlooked groups when it comes to Customer Service Training are technical personnel. Technical personnel are the people that provide technical expertise to customers and other people. This expertise may involve actual repair and maintenance tasks or may involve troubleshooting help or installation assistance. This area is very important when it comes to customer service and customer satisfaction. For reasons we will discuss later, technical people sometimes can do more for a company than all the sales-people and advertising put together!

Enter the Technician!

When it comes to customer service, technicians are treated very differently from the point at which they are hired until the day they leave or retire. It is not because they are different types of people, but rather because we view them, and their jobs, from a different perspective.

When we look to hire a potential technician or technical person, the first thing we look at is their background and technical training. What have they serviced in their careers? What kind of technical training have they received? How recent is their training? Do they have experience on newer equipment or is their experience dated?

All the emphasis is placed on the technical aspects of the job. Very little, if any, thought is given to how these people will interact and relate to your customers! These skills are very often totally overlooked, if thought about at all!

Contrast this with the hiring of a clerk or salesperson. When we hire sales people or customer service people, we generally look for education and training along with personality and interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are the skills we use to communicate and interact with each other on a daily basis.

An example of some interpersonal skills would be verbal skills, presentation skills, tact, diplomacy, and other such skills. Individuals and groups with strong interpersonal skills will perform at a higher level because they have the ability to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively.

In this publication we are going to take an in-depth look into interpersonal skills and how technicians use them to be effective in their jobs. We will look at how we can use these skills to help us. We will also look at how poor use of these same skills can hurt us.

Technicians and Customer Service

As previously stated, many people, and companies, tend to think of technicians as purely technical people. They stress technical and equipment training. They make sure that a technician is trained on whatever products the company services. They do this to assure themselves, and the customer, that you will have a better than average chance of being able to resolve the problem once you are in front of the equipment.

That makes sense doesn't it? If you are going to work on something, you should be trained, correct? I would like you to look at this same situation from another angle. When you arrive at a customer's home, or meet a customer in your store, there are TWO items that need to be repaired. The first is the piece of equipment that has the problem. This is where your technical expertise comes into play. Your training helps you here, also.

The second item that must be "repaired" is the customer's relationship with the product and you or your company! You may think this is a little bit funny or strange but it is true none the less. Here is why this relationship has been damaged:

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 amount 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!

Our comfort zone is what determines what we do and how we do it. As technicians or technical personnel, it is our responsibility to take steps to increase that comfort zone in the customer's mind. How do we go about accomplishing this feat? Why do we have to do it differently than other people in our company? We have to do it because:

Service Technicians See Our Customers When They Are Most Vulnerable!

When a technician deals with a customer, that customer is usually at his or her most vulnerable point. They have a problem that they are powerless to resolve themselves and they are at your "mercy" in trying to resolve it. Because of this feeling of helplessness, their "comfort zone" is very small indeed.

It is important for a technician to understand how customers feel when they need to call in a service tech. Most of the time the customer will have little or no knowledge on how the piece of equipment works. They will not understand certain technical terms or language. What they do understand is that they need the service you offer and they depend on you to provide those services in a professional and timely manner.

They may certain pre-conceived notions about your service and what they should expect. The service tech must deal with these notions whether they are based on reality or fantasy. These notions cannot be dismissed as foolish or invalid. Rather, we must take great pains in making sure that we address each of these notions and let the customer know what he or she should expect from the service experience. This is called setting a level of expectations.

In its basic form, a level of expectation is what the customer can and should expect from you and your company. Anything less than this level of expectation is not acceptable and will require an explanation. Anything over and above this level is unexpected and a pleasant surprise. Every effort must be made to insure that the level of expectations are met every time and exceeded most of the time.

In some cases, levels of expectations are set artificially high prior to a technician getting the service request. When selling a service contract for example, a salesperson may state, "When you have a problem, we'll have a tech there in under an hour!" While these statements may induce a company to sign the contract, they set the stage for failure if the company cannot back those statements up with that level of service.

Everyone involved in the service process must understand what the level of expectations is for every customer. This knowledge helps you prioritize service requests, establish workflow, and accurately meet the requirements of your customers.

Up to this point we have discussed customer satisfaction, confidence, and the customers comfort zone. Hopefully you understand the importance of each of these topics. If not, please re

read these pages again until you have a full understanding of what these topics mean. It is not possible to continue building skills if you are not comfortable with the information covered to this point.

Customers Can (and do) Leave!

It is important to realize that your customers are not tied to your company for life. Unless your business has a total monopoly on your products or industry, your customers can go to whomever they choose to go to for service. Always remember that your business depends on customer for income and survival. Your customers can survive without your business but your business cannot survive without its customers! It is important that your business understands this premise. Your customers will continue to do business with you only as long as they come away from the situation with a positive and good feeling. This includes being appreciated, getting value for their money, and having each and every one of their needs addressed. Fail to accomplish any of these items and you place that customers future business at risk! Customer Service skills are used to address these issues.

Some Customer Service Basics!

This next chapter is going to cover some customer service basics. This section is not designed to be a full customer service training program but rather a highlighted version of customer service as it pertains to service technicians. For a full training program on Customer Service Basics, please see our catalog of Customer Service products.

What Are Customers?

Customers are people or companies that purchase goods or services from your company. Their purchases produce revenue that your company uses to purchase materials, pay salaries, overhead, and generate profits.

It is important for you to realize that your customers are not bound to your company in any way. Unless you are a virtual monopoly, your customers have other sources available to them for the same goods and services. Put in its basic sense, "You need your customers to stay in business, they do not need you!"

This is important because it is the quality of your service, both technical service and customer service, that will determine whether your customers continue to do business with you or your competition. That is why we all must focus on providing the very best service to our customer every time they require it.

We should also understand that our customers are the reason we have jobs. They are the reason we can feed our families, buy houses, drive cars, and have the other things that make our lives what they are. Without customers, businesses would have no revenue. Without revenue, no money for products, employees, or profits. Get the picture?

Let's talk about what customers are NOT. Customers are not:

- A distraction

- An inconvenience
- People to be tolerated

If we think of our customers as distractions or just tolerate them, it will show in our voice and body language. We must learn to appreciate our customers and what they represent to us.

What is the 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 going 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 the. 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 effected 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.

How Do You Talk to Customers?

Be Positive!

In sales, service, or customer service, how we talk to our co-workers, customers, and other people determines our level of effectiveness and success. Very often two different people will offer the same solution to the same person and it will be turned down one time and accepted the next! Why is this?

Most of the time it is the way we convey our message more than the actual message. If we take time to phrase things properly, and plan out our responses, we will stand a much better chance of success. In order to learn how to phrase our message, we need to understand how the human mind responds to different words.

When we hear negative sounding words such as can't, won't, not, no, etc., our minds sometimes shut down and refuse to hear anything else the person is saying to us. The negative words mean that we are not getting what we want and we react in a negative manner. The big problem with this is that you may follow up negative comments with extremely positive ones and the other party may not even hear them!

Try to make a conscious effort to eliminate negative words from your statements. Make every statement from the positive point of view. Here are some examples:

Wrong: I can't do that.

Better: Let me tell you what I can do for you.

Wrong: That's not my area.

Better: Let me direct you to the person that can help you.

Wrong: I don't know the answer to that question.

Better: Let me find out that information for you.

Wrong: That's not possible. It's against company policy.

Better: I have another suggestion. Why don't we.....

Those examples should give you an idea of what we are talking about. Eliminating negative words lets your customer feel that you are trying to help them. They will remain open minded longer than if you use negative wording in your responses.

The last phrase is an example of one customer service problem. Your customers do not care at all if something is against your company policy. Your internal policies are your problem not theirs. It is best never to use company policy as an excuse. One exception to this rule would be warranty coverage. Your warranty has specific conditions attached to it and it is proper to use these conditions in your conversations with the customer. In these cases, you are using a policy to insure that all customers are being treated equally and fairly regarding warranty claims.

By using positive sounding statements you will decrease the time it takes to resolve issues and keep you customers open minded for a longer period of time. This is crucial to resolving issues in a win-win fashion. You should always remember that in customer service you must keep the lines of communication open. If communication stops, or is only happening one-way, your chances for success are doomed.

What we are going to start now is the actual service procedure. We will take you through every part of the service process. From that first phone call to the scheduling, actual service call, and follow-up, we will examine the effect of both good and poor customer service.

Customer Service & The Service Process!

a) Scheduling the Service Call

The first contact the customer has with your service department is when they first call in for service. They have realized there is a problem with something they own and that you are the people that can fix it. The item may be under service contract, they may have found your name in the phone book, or they were directed to your company by the manufacturer. Either way, they have a problem and they are turning to you, or your company, for a solution. It is up to you to provide that solution.

The first contact is the most important contact you will have with that customer. It will help set the tone for the entire service experience. If the customer walks away from that first contact with a positive impression of you and your company, they will tend to be more easily satisfied during the rest of the process. If they are "turned off" during this first contact, everything else down the line will be made more difficult.

The value of a human contact during that first call is critical. Routinely having an answering service or voice mail accept these calls is a mistake. Keep in mind the customer comfort zone. Being able to talk to a human being about their problem makes their comfort zone bigger. Leaving a message on an answering machine just might make it smaller! If you must use an answering machine or service, return these phone calls as quickly as possible. Don't wait until the end of the day to pick up the 47 messages you have! Pick up messages several times during the day and return them promptly.

When you talk to that customer, always use a friendly tone of voice. Being friendly and upbeat allows you to reduce the frustration level that may already exist. If you use a monotone or annoyed voice, you may tend to get the customer more frustrated and annoyed. The more positive you can make this conversation, the more accurate information you will be able to get out of it! If you are not sure how to pronounce the customer's name, ask them. Saying something like;

"I'm not quite sure how to pronounce your name, sir. Could you pronounce it for me?" or make an effort to pronounce it and then say, "I hope I pronounced that correctly, sir." Always use last names and Mr. or Miss, or Mrs. Do not refer to a customer as Mike or Bill or John unless you know them or they tell you to. Keep the conversation professional at all times.

Listen, Listen, Listen, Listen, and Listen!

When you talk to the customer, listen to what he or she has to say. Make sure that you understand what it is that the customer wants and what it is that the customer expects from you. The customer will readily share some information with you. Other information will be your responsibility to get from them. For example, the customer may say that their widget doesn't work. You would then ask what exactly is the problem, when does it not work, and other questions to accurately determine what the problem is. Ask the questions and then listen to the answers.

Don't cut off the customer when he or she is talking about their problem. Letting the customer talk accomplishes two very important things. First of all, talking about the problem allows the customer a chance to vent their frustrations and feelings. Being able to vent their frustrations allows them to reduce their anger and anxiety. This in turn lets them become less frustrated, more relaxed, and more receptive to your questions and suggestions.

The second thing that is accomplished by letting the customer talk is that you can gain valuable insights as to what the problem really is. Little bits of information may actually help you in diagnosing the problem more accurately. The more accurate your diagnosis, the greater chance you have in having the correct parts when you visit the customer's home. Since your efforts should be focused on resolving the problem in one site visit, having the correct parts is critical.

Asking questions also allows you to "head off" some service visits entirely. There will be instances where a customer may not be using the device properly, or the problem is a common one that can easily be fixed by the customer themselves. In cases like these, you can simply instruct the customer on what to do and they can fix it themselves! They don't have to wait for a service tech and you save the cost of going to the customer's home. You now have more time to schedule other, more important, jobs and satisfy more customers! That is what I call a win-win situation!

When you do need to schedule a service call, it is very important that all the information you receive from the customer is accurate. Nothing wastes more time than searching for a wrong address, calling a wrong phone number, or ordering parts for the wrong model of equipment.

Since you are at the customer mercy in obtaining this information, be sure to validate every piece of information. Repeat everything back to the customer. Say something like: "I would like to confirm the information you just gave me, Mr. Jones. Your address is 123 First Street East Meadow and your phone is 345-4565. You have an XYZ 1000 copier and your copies have black streaks down the left side. Is that correct?"

By doing this, you are able to catch any mistakes before hanging up with the customer. If you have the phone number wrong and your hang up, how will you call him back? What if the phone number is unlisted? Always confirm information. If you have a piece of information that is alphanumeric, use the A as in apple, B as in boy, method to insure that everything is accurate.

The key is to take whatever measures are required to provide service technicians with all the information they require to arrive at the customers home or place of business, have the right parts, and resolve the problem in one visit. At minimum this requires accurate addresses, phone numbers, and problem descriptions. Any information that is false will only prolong the time required to resolve the problem and reduce customer satisfaction.

It should be noted that in some companies, the person answering the phone would also be the person that responds to the actual service. In cases like these you can inform the customer that you will be responding personally. This may make the customer more cooperative and willing to share more information with you. In other cases, a receptionist or dispatcher may also take this information. This person may or may not have product knowledge. Regardless of who takes the information, steps must be taken to confirm the information before the conversation is terminated.

After the information is taken, the customer is then either given the opportunity to schedule a service call or informed that someone will call them back shortly. Scheduling done during the initial call is far superior customer service wise but may not be possible in smaller companies.

Being able to schedule the actual service call during the first contact shortens the total time it takes to resolve the issue. It also addresses the customer concerns at that point and helps increase his confidence in you and your company. It also increases their comfort zone! When a customer has a specific day and time assigned to them, they are more apt to be reassured that their problem is going to be addressed. If they are told that someone will call them back later, they will remain cautious until the call is returned. Therefore, make every effort to schedule the service call during the initial contact. If this is possible, then return the customer phone calls as fast as is humanly possible. The faster you return the phone call the more faith and confidence your customer is going to have in you and your company.

If the initial request for service is taken by someone outside of the service department and then relayed to the service department, scheduling during the first contact is not possible. In these cases, the service technicians themselves may make the follow-up phone call to schedule the repair. If this is the case, the following should occur during that phone call:

1) Confirm the Information

If the service technician is talking with the customer for the first time, he or she should take the opportunity to confirm the contact information and problem description one more time. This way, if the original person did not confirm the information, and there was a problem, we can catch it at this time.

2) Ask Additional Questions

Most of the questions the tech should have at this time will center around the problem description. Since the technician has specialized knowledge of the device, he or she may have additional questions to ask to further diagnose the problem. These questions should be asked at this time. They should, however, be prefaced by something like; "I have a few questions to ask so that I can accurately diagnose the problem and have the correct parts when I come." This lets the customer know that it is his or her best interest to take the time to accurately answer these questions. The key is to ask as many questions as needed to narrow down the possibilities

before getting on site. The better you can narrow down the possibilities, the better chance you have of resolving the problem in one visit.

3) Determine When You Can Do the Service Call!

In order for you to schedule the service call, you need to know two things. First, you have to know when you will have the parts you will need to complete the repair. Second, you will need to know your current schedule and availability. Without these two pieces of information you will reschedule a lot of service calls!

Resist the temptation to schedule an appointment quickly even though you don't have the part in stock. This wastes you time and will disappoint the customer. Always know parts availability before scheduling the service call.

(Note: This only applies when you KNOW that a specific part will be definitely needed. For example, if someone calls up and says the top cover of his machine shattered in 10 pieces, you would not respond to that call until you had the cover in stock. You would give the customer an approximate delivery date and then call to schedule the service. There will be times when you THINK you know what you need but are not 100% sure. In these cases, you will probably have to respond and confirm which part is actually needed. You do not want to make the customer wait for several weeks for a part that you will not need to complete the repair. That will infuriate the customer and deservedly so!

4) Schedule the Service Call

When scheduling a service call, it is important that you be aware of any special needs or requirements that the customer may have. This may include work schedules, children, and other responsibilities. In work environments, it may be a particular time of day when it is the least busy. Whatever these situations are, you need to be aware of them to provide proper customer service.

The ideal situation is when you are available the same time that the customer is available. That is a win-win situation. If it works out that way, Great! If not, then we start negotiating. Ask the customer when someone is usually available or what time of the day is best. Try to accommodate a rough time frame. For example, if the

customer says first thing in the morning is best, and that time is not available, try and offer the second call of the day. If late in the day is better, try and offer your customer appointments later in the afternoon. Do not offer a 1 o'clock appointment to these customers.

Some companies will service a specific territory on a certain day of the week. For example, a company serving five counties may schedule all their calls in one county on Monday, another county for Tuesday, etc. In cases like this, you would say to your customer; "We are in your area on Mondays, what part of the day would be more convenient?" This lets the customer know that Monday is the only day service can be scheduled in their area. Failure to state this up front could backfire on you.

Let's say you start by saying; "When would be convenient for you?" The customer replies; "Wednesday morning is good." You say; "I'm sorry Wednesdays are not good for us." The customer then says; "How about Thursdays?" You say; "Thursdays are not good either." The customer starts to get annoyed and asks; "Are Fridays OK?" You finally state; "I'm sorry but Monday is the only day we are in your area." Don't you think the customer would be really angry at this point? You bet he is! If there are any restrictions on scheduling appointments, be up front with them when dealing with your customers. They will appreciate it in the long run. Believe me, they will.

Try and save early morning and late afternoon appointments for two wage earner families or families with school age children. It may be far easier for a person to arrange to come in an hour later, or leave an hour early, to be present for a service tech than it would be to take an entire day off. Most people have a limited amount of personal or vacation time and it does not make them happy when they must use that time to stay home and wait for a service tech.

Please don't misunderstand this. We are not saying that your time is not as valuable as your customer's time. What we are saying is that you want to keep your customers coming back to your company time and time again. If scheduling service in a way that makes it easier and less painful for them, don't you think that will leave a favorable impression on them? We are talking comfort zones here. Responding to your customer's specific needs enlarges their comfort zone and helps create an overall positive impression.

When scheduling appointments, use a sliding scale of appointment times. A sliding scale uses a specific window of time

that overlaps during the day. For example, if you find that your average service call takes an hour of site time plus 30 minutes of travel, you could schedule your service calls in two or three-hour blocks of time. The day would look something like this:

Appointment # 1	8 AM.
Appointment # 2	9 AM - 11 AM
Appointment # 3	10 AM - 1 PM.
Appointment # 4	12 Noon - 2PM
Appointment # 5	2 PM - 4 PM.

With a schedule like this, shorter service calls enable the tech to get to the next call at the earlier part of the time frame. Normal length calls will allow the tech to get to the next call about in the middle of the time range. Calls that run longer than anticipated will have an hour or so "grace period" built in to the next call.

A schedule like this should be modified according to your individual needs and established industry service practice. The basic advantage of a system like this is that it enables the technician to go through his or her day in an efficient manner while adhering to a promised time frame.

When you schedule the service call, ask your customer if there are any important things you should know. Is the house easy to find? Are there house numbers that are easily visible? What color house is it? Are there any special instructions the tech should follow? Anything the technician may need to know should be indicated on the service record at this time.

5) Confirm the Appointment Time!

What do we do before ending every conversation? Confirm the information. Make sure the customer understands what is going to happen next. Don't leave any doubt in your mind, or the customer's mind about what will transpire in the future. End each conversation like this; "All right, Mr. Smith, our technician will be at your home on Tuesday the 23 between the hours of 10 AM and Noon. The address is 123 first Street, East Meadow and your phone is 555-1345. Do you have any questions?"

This kind of closing allows you to confirm the appointment time, check the address and phone number again, and give your customer one final opportunity to ask any questions they may have. This part of the call produces closure. Closure is the process where the customer's mind accepts the fact that the situation has been closed in a specific way. In this case, an appointment has been scheduled.

6) Follow-Up

If you schedule an appointment more than a few days ahead of time, give the customer a follow-up phone call on the day before the scheduled appointment. It is not uncommon for people to completely forget about an appointment that was scheduled the week before. The follow-up phone call accomplishes several things.

First, it reminds the customer of the appointment. This increases the chance that the customer will be home for the scheduled service call. This reduces wasted time and gas.

Second, it gives the customer a chance to reschedule the call in case something else had come up since your last conversation. The customer may appreciate the ability to reschedule.

Last, but certainly not least, it shows your customers that you run an efficient operation that cares about their customers. Their confidence in your company grows. As their confidence grows, so does their comfort zone. As their comfort zone grows..... Well, you know what happens!

7) Ending the Conversation

Always thank the customer for calling. Tell them you appreciate their business and will respond to their problem the best way possible. Pump them up a little. Make them feel good. Make them feel important. Give them your name and phone number in case they have to call back to cancel or reschedule. Make sure there are no unanswered questions. Ask yourself how you would feel at this point. If you would feel anything less than satisfied, look for ways to make things better NOW!

The Service Call!

It is at this point when we move from a telephone presence to a personal, face to face, force! At this point, the whole game changes. Instead of a voice on the phone, you are now a physical presence that can be seen, touched, smelled, and thoroughly evaluated! Because of this, there are several things we need to address:

1) Appearance

Like it or not, we are all initially judged on the first impression we have with a customer. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the first impression will be made on appearance. Why? Think about what happens when the customer first opens their door or greets you in their office. What's the first thing they do? They look at you. You don't speak to each other before you make eye contact. You look first and then speak. Because of this, your physical appearance carries a tremendous amount of weight!

Appearance carries with it a judgement of your competence. If a customer does not like your appearance, he or she will also question your competence. It is not fair but it is true and you must deal with it. We are not saying that you must repair equipment in a three-piece suit. What we are saying is that your appearance must be considered acceptable for your industry and geographic area.

If the accepted dress for your particular industry is dark trousers, white shirt and dark tie, then that is what you should be wearing. If your industry standard were shorts and a T-shirt, then shorts and a T-shirt would be acceptable.

What you are trying to do is instill a certain level of confidence in the mind of the customer. Your appearance is a major building block on which to build your confidence. It can either help you or hurt you.

Let me give you an example. If you hire someone to clean and vacuum your swimming pool, you would expect the person to come in shorts and a T-shirt. Maybe even a bathing suit would be appropriate. After that you go to a new financial planner to reinvest your entire retirement portfolio. When the financial planner greets you in his office he is wearing shorts and a T-shirt. How confident would you be

investing large sums of money with this individual. Same dress, different industries, and different accepted ways of dress.

Regardless of industry or geographical area one thing is constant. Whatever you wear, and whatever work you do, you need to be clean and well groomed. Your personal hygiene and appearance speak volumes about you as a person. If you show that you do not care about yourself as an individual, why would the customer think you would care about his or her problem?

It is important that we realize that we are dealing with perception here. While perception is not necessarily fact, we must realize that, to that fact, your customer's perceptions, are their reality. What they think, therefore, you are! Because of this, and the impact it has on your customers, service techs should always follow the following guidelines:

- Always be neat and clean. If shorts and a T-shirt are acceptable in your line of work, make it a clean pair of shorts and a clean T-shirt. Also keep in mind that a plain T-shirt may be acceptable but a T-shirt with an offensive or inappropriate design or logo is not!
- Make sure your personal hygiene is what it should be. You may do dirty work but that does not excuse you from keeping yourself clean. One of the most offensive problems is body odor. Customers hate dealing with people with body odor. This may sound funny or rude to some people but it is a fact that we must deal with.
- Keep yourself well groomed. Shave every day and keep your hair well trimmed.

To some of you reading this, this will seem amusing or of little consequence. I assure you that it is not. Your first impression counts a great deal. There have been some instances where a customer will even refuse someone access to their home because of inappropriate appearance. While this will not occur often, it may occur on occasion. Always keep in mind that you need your customers, they do not need you. They can go somewhere else for their service. You can not!

2) Greeting the Customer

Once you get past the initial "look over" from the customer, you will then turn to communication skills. It is important that you look confident when you talk to the customer. Look the customer in the eyes when you talk to them. Do not look down at the floor or off into space somewhere. Making eye contact exhibits confidence and authority. Always look into your customer's eyes when you talk to them.

Always use your customer's name when greeting them. "Good morning, Mrs. Rivera, I'm Jim from ABC Repairs. How are you today?" sounds a lot better than "Hello Ma'am, I'm here to fix your washing machine." Try to make your greeting personable and individualized. Always include the customer's name, your name, and your company name in your greeting. The last thing you want to do is greet your customer with a greeting that appears to be recited from memory or sound impersonal.

Your greeting helps establish your personality. You would like your customers to feel you are friendly, personable, and confident. After your appearance, your greeting is next in importance.

3) Respecting Your Customers Property

Your customer office or home is his or her own "space". It is important that you show respect for this area. If it is rainy or snowy outside, ask the customer if you should remove your shoes before entering their home. Most customers will say no but all of them will appreciate your thoughtfulness. This will also get the customer in the frame of mind to believe that you really care about your customer and their needs.

Think about the opposite. If you were a customer and a repairman came into your home and tracked dirt and grease over your carpets, how would you feel? Not very appreciative or positive towards that person. Your goal is to get that customer to think as positively about you and your company as possible. Showing respect for your customer's property is just another way of helping to achieve that goal.

Another way of showing respect is to put down a drop cloth before starting to work. Whether you are going to make a mess or not, placing a drop cloth down prior to service helps place your customer more at ease and creates a positive impression about you. Another benefit is that the drop cloth allows you to keep track of

small parts that may fall on the floor during the repair. Have you ever tried to find a very small screw in a deep shag rug?

All these things need to take place prior to beginning the actual service procedure. Notice the skills involved. No special technical or repair knowledge is required to do the things we talked about so far. We have just used some common sense and basic communications skills. No rocket science here, just common sense. We treated people like we wanted to be treated ourselves.

Skills Your Customers Want From A Service Technician!

As a service technician you have probably attended several training classes, maybe obtained a college degree, or have a wealth of practical experience that you use everyday. You probably know your equipment inside out. What you probably did not know is that your customer focuses on something else! Here is what your customers expect from you:

- Honesty
- Politeness
- Punctuality
- Fairness
- Compassion
- Courtesy
- Competence
- Friendly

The above eight skills are what your customers are looking for. Out of the eight listed above, only one, Competence, has anything to do with technical training or equipment knowledge! Don't get me wrong. Technical knowledge is a necessity for repairing equipment. It is a must have requirement for a service technician.

The point that I am trying to make is that technical competence is just a small part of the picture. In order to be effective in your job as a technician, you need to integrate the other skills as well. A technician without all the other skills will not be successful. These technicians are better suited to a role as a bench technician where they just fix equipment without much human intervention.

The job of a field service technician is a combination technician/human relations kind of person. They not only repair equipment but also repair the relationship between the customer and the company as well. Two different jobs, two different skill sets.

We have talked about perception. Your customer service and technical skills together help form that perception. We also talked about the value of instilling confidence in the minds of your

customers. To instill confidence, you use your customer service skills to present a positive impression about you and your company.

Technical skills also play an important role in instilling confidence. If you have visited the customer 10 times before for the same problem and cannot make a lasting repair, all the customer service skills in the world are not going to help you! The successful technician is a technician that continually develops both his or her skill sets.

We all know technicians that customers just seem to love! They ask for them by name, write letters of appreciation, and go out of their way to express their satisfaction. They may not be the best trained or have the best skills, yet the customer love them! Why?

Because these technicians have learned how to make people feel good. They take the time to talk to their customers. They find out what their customers need and they find ways of giving it to them. Maybe it requires a little handholding. Maybe it's a follow-up phone call. It may be something as small as a warm smile. Whatever it is, they have identified it and mastered it.

Every technician starts his or her job by riding with someone to learn the little points of the job. Most new technicians concentrate on learning the little tricks and problems with each machine they will work on. Very few step back and see how the older technician treats his customers. This is a very big mistake. Every technician should spend time with another technician to see how he or she handles their customers and service calls. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience out there and it's there for the asking. Ask for it! Learn from it! Develop communication skills as well as technical skills. You'll be more successful and have higher customer satisfaction for your efforts!

Never underestimate the power of customer service skills and your appearance. Always make eye contact with the customer. Stand tall, don't walk or stand hunched over. Make sure your body language says CONFIDANT. We want to do everything we can to exhibit a powerful personality. We want to instill confidence. We want to make our customers glad that we are the ones they called to service their equipment. Not the competition.

Competition! Let's talk about competition! Three different businesses can send three technicians to the same seminar and take

the same courses. They can purchase the same tools and diagnostic equipment. What will separate one business from another? Customer Service Skills!

Think about that for a moment. Customer Service will often set one business ahead of the rest. Why do people buy a certain brand car from a dealer that is miles away? Because of that dealer's reputation for customer service. People have also been known to pay more for the same service based on excellent customer service. People travel large distances to purchase from businesses that have excellent customer service reputations.

The vast majority of repairs can be done by the average well-trained technician. Some tough problem may require above average skills and experience but by and large, a well-trained technician can handle most everyday repairs. Why then do some business have good reputations and others poor reputations?

The difference is that some businesses stress technical skills and training but ignore the human side of the job. They are either ignorant, or chose to ignore that aspect of the job. In order for you, and your company, to be effective and generate a good reputation in the community, every technician must integrate customer service skills into their approach to service.

Doing the Repair!

Do you want to virtually assure yourself of success in most of your service calls? If so, make sure you do this one thing: Get the customer involved in the service call!

Getting the customer involved means make him a part of the process. You are probably doing this to a certain extent already; you just need to expand on it.

When a technician goes on a service call, he or she should always ask the customer what the problem is. Even though it should be listed on the service ticket, the problem should always be confirmed with the customer. Ask the customer to confirm what you have been told already. Ask the customer questions about when the problem occurs. Get as much information as possible. Make the customer involved. Consider having the customer demonstrate the problem. While the customer is operating the unit, you can observe to see if he or she is doing anything wrong that may have caused the problem. Making the customer involved accomplishes two things.

First, it allows the customer a chance to explain his or her problem and vent their frustrations if they have any. This reduces their anxiety and eases their fear of the unknown. Second, by making the customer part of the process, you will stand a much better chance of having your customer accept whatever solution you decide on.

For example, if the customer feels confident in your judgement, and you have explained things to him every step of the way, your customer will tend to accept your decision to adjust a part rather than demand a replacement. The idea is to get your customer involved so that they can "buy in" to your solution. You want to work together to get a problem resolved. You want to create a win-win situation between you, your company, and the customer. If you can achieve this, you have done an excellent job!

Use your listening skills to gather information about the problem. While some problems will be easy to spot, others may be impossible to solve without specific information. Always listen to the customer. It will save you time and money and make the customer feel better at the same time!

Many technicians know what a problem is before they walk in the door. It could be a very common problem that occurs in every unit they service. In cases like these, a technician may dismiss the customer's comments and tell them they know what the problem is. This is a very dangerous thing to do for the following reasons.

Dismissing a customer's comments can be interpreted as a very rude gesture. It tells the customer that you do not think what he or she has to say is worthwhile listening to. It also gives the customer the impression that you feel yourself to be superior to the customer. All these feelings will tend to have a negative effect on the customers' feelings towards you. What do you think that will do to your customers comfort zone? It will probably reduce it. That is not the result we are looking for.

Another important reason for listening to the customer is that we may pick up one little piece of information that could be critical to diagnosing a problem. Let's say we stop the customer in the middle of his comments. We stop him before he can say that the problem only shows up after the unit has been on for an hour or so. Maybe the problem only occurs when it is very humid or some other special time. If we don't know this, we could spend wasted time and money trying to repair the unit.

Some people are funny. If you cut them off when they are trying to tell you something, they very often will not offer any more information until they are specifically asked for it. They will sit there and watch you sweat, knowing that the unit will work fine for another hour, without telling you that. Call it spite, call it thick-headed. They just will not help you. I'm not sure that I blame them, either.

It is important that you realize that a technician's job is a partnership between you and the customer. You need the customer to tell you what is wrong and the customer needs you to repair the piece of equipment. When any part of this relationship becomes strained or non-productive, the entire relationship goes down the drain.

Now we are at the point where you have gathered all the information that you will need. Now we let the technical skills come out and take care of the actual repair. While we are doing that, however, let's use our head just a little bit customer service wise.

There are a few things you should never do while repairing a customer's piece of equipment. They are:

1) Never put down or insult the customers' equipment.

Remember that the customer made the decision to purchase that particular make and model of equipment. Something made the customer purchase it. It may have been the looks, features, manufacturer, advertisement, etc. Something struck a cord with the customer to make him purchase it. If you insult the equipment, you run the risk of insulting the customer right along with it. Keep your opinions to yourself. Be careful even when you are asked about your opinions. Try and remain neutral and non-committal.

2) Don't make comments or talk to yourself while working.

How would you feel if you went to the dentist and he said "Oh, damn!" while he was working on your mouth? Not very good! Customers pay attention to you when you are working on their equipment. When they hear negative comments they tend to react with negativity. They may start to worry that things are really worse than they are. They might blow things way out of proportion. Keeping audible comments to yourself at all times.

3) If the customer asks what you are doing, tell them!

Unless you work for the government, your actions and techniques do not represent classified information. When a customer asks what you are doing, usually they are just curious. Explain things to them and they will be happy. Again, this is making them part of the process. If you ignore them or talk down to them, your customers will pick up on that.

4) If the problem is a common one, reassure the customer.

Reassuring the customer reduces anxiety, increases confidence, and increases your customers comfort zone. Let them know you have seen this problem before and the repair will take care of it with no problem. If the replacement part was changed because of the problem, make sure the customer knows you are installing a heavier duty replacement so that the problem will not come back.

The more you can reassure your customer, the more likely he or she will be satisfied at the end of your visit!

5) When you're done, and you've tested your repair, let the customer turn the dials and pull the knobs!

Here again, customer intervention should be encouraged. When you are done, and before you start packing up, invite your customer to try out the unit. Let them see that it works. Answer any questions. Ask the customer if the unit seems to be working properly. If everything appears to be working perfectly, you can pack up your tools and equipment.

6) Explain what you did and why.

When you are done with the repair, explain what you did to the equipment. Let the customer know what parts you replaced and why. Explain the charges, if any, and the warranty period on the repair. If there are any specific things the customer must know, let them know now. Maybe they can't use the equipment until adhesives dry. Explain that to them now.

7) Ask your customer if there is anything else you can do for them.

You are already at the customer's home or office. Take advantage of that and ask if there is something else you can do for them. This is a perfect opportunity to generate additional income for you or your company. Everyone wins! The customer does not have to stay home for another appointment and your company makes a few extra dollars. Everybody is happy!

8) Close out the call.

Let the customer know that you are finished and the repair is complete. You want to eliminate any thought in the customer's mind that you are going to come back and do something in the future. Let your customer know that the repair is finished and thank him for the

opportunity to be of service. Be friendly and personable. Make sure that they know you appreciate their business.

9) Thank the customer again and wish them well.

Take a few minutes and thank the customer again. Tell them to have a nice day and offer them a business card with your phone number on it. Inform them that they should call if they have any other problems or questions. Shake hands with them and leave.

These steps will help you complete the service call in an extremely productive manner. Go through each of these steps and every service call you make. These steps should take no more than 5 minutes to do yet will save you hours of time and a good amount of money over the years. They are not technical skills; they are customer service skills. Learn them. Use them. Update them.

When You Can't Complete a Service Call!

Up until now we have dealt with the easiest of situations. Someone has a problem; we schedule the repair, arrive at the home, and repair the unit. Everybody's happy and we move on to the next call. Unfortunately, that is not the way it happens all of the time.

Rescheduled service calls happen for a variety of reasons. Most of the time it's parts. Nobody makes a van or stockroom large enough to carry every part for every model that you will be called upon to service. There will be instances where you will not have the right part to complete a repair. When this happens, you should add the following steps to your service call skills:

1) Inform the customer what is going to happen next!

One of the most important thing to do when you have to return to complete a repair is to let the customer know exactly what is going to happen next. If a part has to be ordered, don't just tell them the part will be ordered and then you will call to reschedule. That may sound a little abrupt to the customers. Instead, try something like this:

"Mr. Smith, I need to replace the feed motor in your unit. They don't fail that often so I don't stock that part. I will contact my office today and they will order the part on their next order, which gets submitted on Thursday. Usually it takes about two weeks to get the part if the manufacturer has it in stock. If there is any delay we will notify you. If you have any questions about your part, you can call our Debby in our parts department at ext. 2345."

That gives the customer all they need to know and then some. It gives the customer a contact name and phone number in the parts department to call if they have any questions. It also gives the customer an idea of the time frames involved. What you are doing is setting a certain level of expectation in the mind of the customer.

Suppose you just told the customer that you need to order a part and will return to complete the repair. The customer has no idea how long they should be waiting. Maybe the customer will wait the two weeks. Maybe they will expect you back in two days! Without setting the level of expectation yourself, you have no idea what the customer expects. This places customer satisfaction in doubt. Always take the time to explain what is going to happen with the customer. It takes less than two minutes and can save a lot of problems later.

2) Never promise what you can't deliver.

One very common problem is that the customer is not very happy that you cannot complete the repair during the first visit. Maybe they need the equipment for their business or maybe it's just something they enjoy using very often. Either way, they are not satisfied when told that there will be a two-week wait for the part to arrive.

Very often we are tempted to promise something to the customer just to be able to get out of the house or office. "OK, Mr. Smith, I'll put a rush on it and we can get the part in two days. We'll call to reschedule." If you can get the part in two days, that statement is just fine. It addresses a customer concern and provides a solution to the problem. If you can't get the part in within that two-day time frame then you have taken a bad problem and made it much worse.

Your customers are not stupid. When that part doesn't come in, they know you just told them something to shut them up. They will become angry with you and your company for doing that. Their anger will make it that much harder for you when you return to complete the repair. If that is not bad enough, something far more important has occurred.

Your customer now realizes that you lied to them. Your credibility and relationship with that customer has been damaged. Depending on the type of person the customer is, the relationship may be damaged beyond repair. At best, your company is going to have to work very hard to regain the trust of that customer.

Every technician should have a basic knowledge of how long it takes to receive a part after it has been ordered. If orders are sent to the manufacturer only during certain times of the week or month, the technician should be aware of that also. This information will make it

easier for you to determine an approximate wait time for the part you need.

Make sure your customers know that your time frames are estimates. Explain that you and your company have no control over what the manufacturer or distributor carries in their inventories. Let them know that you will do your best to get the part in as quickly as you can. Do everything to reassure the customer but do not over promise. It will come back to bite you. One more thing, when your customer loses confidence in you and your company, what does that do to their comfort zone? It not only reduces it, it can wipe it right out!

3) Follow - up with the Customer!

More companies, large and small, fall far short in this area. When you have a customer waiting for a part and it doesn't come in on schedule, do you call them? Unless it is a "hot" customer, probably not. This is a mistake.

Someone has given the customer a time frame for getting parts and service on their equipment. That time line sets the expectation level of the customer. If he is told two weeks to get the part, he will expect to be notified within a day or two of that two-week time frame. If he is not notified, then they start to get frustrated. What's going on? Why haven't they called? Maybe they can't get the part! If they can't get the part, they can't fix the machine. I can't afford a new machine! What will I do without this machine?

The customer's mind starts to create all these different reasons why you have not called them to schedule the return visit. From the smallest problem to utter catastrophe, every scenario starts to go through the customer mind. One simple phone call can eliminate this problem.

Keep the customer in the loop regarding their parts. Let them know the unit is backordered from the distributor but they expect it in within a few days. Let them know you can't get the part from the manufacturer because they don't have it in stock. Whatever the reason, share it with them. Even if you forgot to order it, be up front about it. It is better to find out from you than it is for your customer to discover that later!

Sharing information accomplishes several things. It keeps the customer informed about the status of his or her part. This reduces frustration levels. It also lets the customer know that you are doing

everything you can do and the problem rests with another company. Let your customer get angry with the manufacturer when you can't get a part. Your relationship with the customer is what you need to protect every day. Don't let anything come between you and that relationship.

4) Reschedule With Priority!

When the part comes in, make every effort to quickly reschedule the service call. It's not right that this customer be put on the end of the list for service. They have waited patiently and deserve fast response. Depending on company policy you may want to schedule the call when you have confirmation that the part has been shipped. That can save a few days. Sometimes companies leave a few slots open for reschedules and emergencies. This allows you to get the call completed quickly. The faster you respond, the happier your customer will be.

When the Service is Complete!

When the service call is complete, the job is not. Paperwork regarding the job should be completed and turned in as quickly as possible. The reason for this is that if the customer should call with a question about the service, the information will not be available to the people back in the office. If you work for a large company with multiple offices, the main office may think the job was not even done yet because they have not received the paperwork! The job isn't over until the paperwork is done!

In addition to the paperwork, the following steps should be taken whenever a service has been completed:

1) What parts were used?

Do you need to change your parts stocking levels? Are you using parts now that you were not in the past? Should you begin stocking a particular part in your parts department? All these questions should be asked as the job is being entered into your computer system.

2) Is all the paperwork there?

Are all the required paperwork forms available? If this is a warranty job was the paperwork submitted for payment? If the customer is to be billed, has a bill been generated? If the customer has a service contract, has this information been entered in against that contract?

Service businesses are in the business of making money. If all repairs are not billed out to the proper people, the business will lose money. If that should continue, people will lose their jobs. Pay attention to paperwork.

3) Is the customer satisfied?

Do you want to blow the doors off your competition? Call your customer a few days after they received service and ask them if

everything is still all right. They won't expect it and will be very appreciative. You may get a few extra service calls because of these follow-up calls but it is better to satisfy a customer than to lose him to your competition.

Another important piece of the follow-up procedure is the Customer Satisfaction survey. This survey asks your customer to give you their opinions and comments on what you did well and what you can do better. This information can go a long way in improving your service efforts.

The follow-up survey is not to be used as a substitute for the follow-up phone call. Each serves a different purpose. Use both to find out how you are really doing!

4) Create a follow-up database!

A follow-up database can increase your customer satisfaction and bring in additional revenue! When you do service on units not covered under a service contract, add their names to a database. When these units are due for periodic maintenance or cleaning, send the customer a postcard, or give them a call, and let them know that their units are due for maintenance. This lets the customer know you are looking out for them and will also bring in \$\$\$\$\$ from these maintenance calls.

Maintenance calls are great because they can be schedule in advance for the slowest days or times of the year. They are great for fill-in work also. Offer the customer a reduced rate for last minute scheduling. Give them a discount for same day scheduling. Then, if you get a cancellation, or if a technician is running ahead of schedule, you can use these calls as fill-in work! You fill up your day and the company gets some added revenue. Your customer is happy to keep his equipment up and running. A true win-win situation!

Generating Revenue through Service

One very good reason for concentrating on providing top-notch customer service to your customers is that this type of service can be leveraged into increased sales or revenue.

Let's take a moment and think about what brings your customers to you rather than to your competition. Most successful businesses have a "unique selling position" within the area that they do business.

A "unique selling position" means that your business provides something to your customers that your competition does not. It may be a specific product, location, a service you offer, or special pricing. Whatever it is, it is something that gives your business an advantage over everyone else. To be successful, you must learn to promote that advantage and inform others about it.

Think about what happens when a new product is released. We are exposed to print and media advertising that tells us what it does, why we need it, and sometimes, where to buy it. Without this advertising, we would only see the product if we happened to be in a store that carried it. We would not go looking for it, or go to a certain store to find it. There would be a good chance we may never even know the product is different.

The same could be said for service. If you offer an exceptional level of service to your customers, PROMOTE IT! Otherwise, the only way your customers will find out about it is through word of mouth. Word of mouth is great but its reach is limited. If your service is exceptional, promote it in your advertising. Use store signs touting your service department! Let your customers know that they can purchase through you and not worry about what to do when things go wrong!

Want to knock your competition for a loop? If you service products sold elsewhere, advertise in your competition's area for the service work on the equipment you sold! When you get the customer to contact you for service, you have an ideal opportunity to show

them just how much your company can do for them. The next time they purchase, they will purchase from you!

In sales, salespeople have various "tools" they use to convince customers to purchase their products. These tools are focused on the benefits realized by the customer. How will the product address the needs of the customer? How will it improve the quality of life of the customer? Everything is focused on the benefits perceived by the customers. Why? Because these benefits must be at or above a certain level for the customer to purchase the product! We want the customer to purchase NOW! We do not want them to wait and check out other retailers in the area. When the customer enters our store, or calls our number, we want them to buy right then and there!

After sale service plays an important role in perceived benefits to you customers. Service represents security and peace of mind. These are two very important issues with customers. Generally speaking, the more expensive the product, the more thought and value is placed on after sale support and service. This can set your business apart from everyone else!

Let's say you were in the market for a new car. Where would you buy the car, at a dealer that provides good service to their customers or from a dealer that is known for their poor customer service? You would choose the dealer with the excellent customer service reputation. Why? Because you are investing thousands of dollars in a product that you will use for many years. You will require maintenance and service. Because of this, service will be a very important determining factor!

People are also known to pay more for good service and the piece of mind that comes with it. People will pay a few dollars more to buy from a reputable dealer instead of a discount store or warehouse club. They will pay more if they feel the support services from that business are important. In cases like these, customer service skills can make you more money on the products and services you sell!

WARNING!!!!!!

Do NOT market your service if it is not up to the quality that it needs to be. Marketing service to your customers will raise their expectation level. If you fail to meet this level you will damage the relationship you have with that customer. Get your service department to where it needs to be and then promote it. Do not over

state your capabilities or promise more than you can consistently deliver. Always keep in mind that anything you say to your customers changes their level of expectations. Never let that level of expectation exceed your capabilities.

Marketing Customer Service & Equipment Service

Let's say you have your service operation humming on all cylinders. You've worked out all the kinks and everyone is on the same page as far as customer service is concerned. How do we go about marketing service? What are the critical aspects of service that we should address in our marketing campaign?

The basic things to stress when marketing service are:

- 1) Peace of mind.** You need to stress that buying from you will insure the customers that all their needs in the future will be taken care of by your company. Peace of mind is a very powerful emotion that must be addressed when marketing service.
- 2) Reliability.** Tell your customers that you are reliable and let them know you can be counted upon when troubles should surface. Point out why you can respond better than your competition.
- 3) Response time.** Your customers do not want to wait for service! If you have a staff that can respond quickly, let your customers know this! Don't let them think that your competition will respond as quickly as you can. If you can do it faster, let them know it!
- 4) Certifications** (if applicable) Like it or not, industry certifications inspire confidence in the eyes of your customers. If your particular industry offers a certification program, join it! Put the certification seal on your trucks and in all your advertising. Today, many people are wary about the quality of work being performed. Certifications offer a way for the customer to feel secure in the people doing their work.
- 5) Community presence.** In today's marketplace, customers can purchase just about everything through the mail or over the Internet. Let your customers know that you have a presence in your community and will be there whenever there is a problem. You are

accessible to them. Point that out! Publicize your involvement in the community. Sponsor a sports team; donate something to a school or other civic organization. When you do something along these lines, make sure you get some kind of recognition. Your company name in a yearbook or flyer will help get your name out to the public.

6) Length of time you have been in the area. (Serving you since 19....) Chances are, if you have been in business for a long time, you are doing something right. Longevity helps establish credibility in the eyes of your customers. Using phrases such as "Serving you for over 45 years" or "Since 1952" let your customers know that you have been in business for a long time. Your customers want to feel secure that you will be there one or two years from now when there is a problem. Letting them know you've been there a long time already helps in establishing that confidence.

7) Ease of contact. Stress how easy it is to contact you. Offer an 800 phone number. List your hours of operation. If you offer weekend or 24-hour service, list that in our advertising. Explain how contacting you will be easier than contacting your competition or out of state mail order business. Your customers like things easy! If you can make it easier to do business with our company, you will get more customers!

Remember our discussion on Comfort zones? All of the above items are geared towards establishing, and enlarging, comfort zones! The larger the comfort zone, the greater chance you have of getting that customer to do business with you and your company.

Marketing and promoting service should be done with the intention of getting potential customers to TRY your company. Do not overly concentrate on long-term advantages. If they are important in your industry then address them briefly. Otherwise, stress things in your marketing that will induce people to give your company a try. That should be your focus.

The objective here is to get your customers exposed to what your company can do. Once you have access to a customer, your internal actions, policies, produces, and talents will carry the majority of the burden of satisfying the customer. If your internal operations, products, and service are exceptional, the experience your customer

has with you will far exceed the value of 10,000 words of print advertising!

Warranty vs. Non-Warranty Business

Warranty business may be business that you get because you are the only business in your area that is authorized to do the repairs and be compensated by the manufacturer. You get your referrals through the manufacturer, retail outlets, or print advertising. It is important that you take advantage of these opportunities and maximize their benefit to you.

When you talk to customers about their warranty work, also take the time to explain the other products and services you can offer your customers. Let them know you are there for all their repair needs whether they are covered under warranty or not. If you offer services or products in a related area, talk that up to your customers. Plant the seeds in their mind should they have a need for these items in the future!

Talking up related products and services helps both parties. A certain percentage of these customers will purchase these items from you. That means extra income for you and your company. All your customers will be impressed when they are made aware of everything you have to offer. Being able to offer a wide range of services and products makes it easier for your customer to become impressed with your company. Being impressed enlarges that comfort zone we keep talking about!

If you don't offer warranty service, consider taking it on. Warranty listings amount to free advertising and leads generated that funnel business to your company. That must be taken into consideration when determining the value of warranty service.

Aligning Yourself with Others!

Customer Service skills teach us that we must make every effort to make things easy on the customer. A very effective way of doing this is to align your company with local retailers in your area that don't offer service. Department stores, warehouse clubs, independent retailers, and other businesses are prime candidates.

Approach these businesses and offer to do service on the products they sell for their customers. You could offer a commission on each repair or offer priority service to their customers. (Priority service is a better option because you save on the commission.) This accomplishes two things.

First, it gives you a source for new business. Your name will be recommended whenever a customer inquires about service. That will result in a steady stream of revenue. Second, the other stores will benefit because they will have an answer for one of their customers needs. When asked about warranty or service, the salesperson will have a specific name and business to present to the customer instead of just saying, "There's a list of places in the warranty booklet."

Things to Avoid!

We have spent a great deal of time talking about what we should do when we talk and deal with customers. Equally important are the things we should NOT do! While it is impossible to cover everything, the following is a brief list of some of the more important things to avoid:

- 1) Talk concerning politics or religion.** These topics are quite personal and many people have strong feelings about them. It is unwise to enter discussions or make comments on these subjects. We do not want to risk having a personal opinion come between a business and a customer.

- 2) Jokes** Much like religion and politics, an individual sense of humor will vary greatly. What one person finds funny another may feel offended. Keep jokes or funny stories to a minimum. That does not mean you should be serious and rigid in your dealing with the customer. Be friendly and cheerful but watch out for jokes and other similar stories.

- 3) Knocking your competition.** Never put down someone else who has worked on the unit or anyone that is your competition. It is not very professional and can come back to haunt you. I know of one technician who looked at a repair and said "Wow! Who worked on this last? He sure didn't know what he was doing!" It turned out that he was the one that worked on the unit last! Try and recover from that blunder! If asked specifically about another serviceperson or competition, just say you really don't have any first hand information about them. Then, turn the conversation around to what your company does better. Your customers will appreciate that and will also tend to discount anything you say about your competition anyway.

- 4) Dishonesty** Some people will attempt to get you to do something dishonest in order for them to save a few dollars. Some times people will ask you if you would like to do the job yourself at night or on

weekends at a lower price than if your company would do it.

ALWAYS REFUSE THESE OFFERS!

These offers are made by people who will have no problem turning you in to your company if things don't go right. They may even hold it over your head to get other work done. It is just not worth it. Besides, the very best reason for not doing it is: It's just not right!

If offers like these are made, it is a good idea to report them to your company after the work is completed. This way, if the customer does call and complain and make up some story about you, your comments will already be on file. Be careful, there are a lot of funny people out there!

5) Avoid the liquid lunch! Resist the temptation to have that beer with lunch. Even on those 95-degree summer days! The smell of alcohol, even just one beer or drink, can stay on your breath for quite a while. Even if it doesn't effect your performance, the customer may feel otherwise. Another important reason, never drink and drive!

6) Poor Driving! When you are driving a vehicle with your company's logo or name on it, you are representing the company. You may not be at the customer's home, or even on company business. Since people can see whom the vehicle represents, your actions behind the wheel are a reflection on your company. If people see you driving erratically or dangerously, that will send a negative message to their brains about the company. Don't risk that to save a few minutes!

7) Thinking you know it all! Most of us feel that we know ourselves better than anyone else. We think we have a good grasp of what we are doing and how we are doing it. The reality is, we see things from one vantagepoint; our eyes and ears. Other people, such as co-workers, friends, and family, see us from a totally different perspective and may be able to provide valuable insight on how we act and appear in front of others. It is very difficult to know how we sound or look to other people without this feedback. Ask other people for their feedback on how we deal with other people. Don't take negative comments as criticism but rather as constructive comments that will enable you to improve your customer service skills.

On The Business Side.....

1) Avoid using substandard parts! The quality of your work speaks volumes about your company and how it regards its customers. By using substandard parts, you place that quality in a dangerous position. Use the best parts you can find in all your work.

2) Avoid ambiguous wording in your warranty. If you offer a warranty on your work, make the wording of the warranty easy to follow and understand. Make sure a fifth grade student can read and understand it. Unclear warranties can add to frustration levels and conflicts. Keep wording simple!

3) Don't promise what you can't deliver! You are much better off turning down business that you can't handle than taking it on and disappointing a customer. Customers appreciate honesty. Though you risk losing a customer to your competition, you will stand a much better chance of getting that customer in the future if you do right by them today! Only promise what you know you can deliver!

4) Old or dirty vehicles Your vehicles are a reflection of your company. Keep vehicles properly maintained and clean. If your customers see old and filthy vehicles pull up to their homes, what impression do you think they will have. Just as your employee's appearance reflects on their competence, your vehicles appearance also reflects on your company.

4) Don't rely on voice mail! Try and keep the human element in as much of your dealings with customers as possible. Customers hate voice mail! If you find a significant number of calls going to voice mail every day, it may be time to think about adding another person to handle these calls.

Absolute Must Do's

- 1) Exceed your customer's expectations.** Always try to go one step further. Give the customer something in addition to what they expect. Always be on the lookout for new things to offer your customers.
- 2) Be Innovative!** There are very rare instances when only one solution will work. Don't be afraid to come up with new ways to deal with the same old problems.
- 3) Learn from your mistakes!** If you do or say something wrong to a customer, don't beat yourself up over it. We all make mistakes. It's what we do with these mistakes that is important. Learn from your mistakes. Think about what happened and why. Try and determine what should have been done or said at that time. This way, the next time you are in that situation you will know what to say or do. If you don't do this, you will keep making the same mistakes over and over again!
- 4) Avoid Using Technical Language.** When talking to your customers, avoid using technical terms that the customer may not understand. This goes not only for service techs but also parts people, dispatchers, and other people the customer may deal with. Try to explain everything in an easy to understand manner. This will reduce the frustration level of the customer and make them more receptive to what you have to say.

Conclusion

Customer Service skills should be a very big part of every technicians training. These skills will enable you to do your work better, faster, and more easily. They will aid in reducing the stress levels of both you and your customers. Learn these skills and practice them carefully until they become habit.

Enlist the help of others in evaluating your skill in dealing with others. Use role playing or other group activities to critique each other. Make customer service skills part of your service meetings. Share things that worked well or failed miserably. A failure can be a success if you and others learn from it.

Technicians can and should be used as a sales resource. Very few people have such close contact with customers on a daily basis. Invest in this resource. Providing each technician with some sales focused training is a good idea when marketing service. Technicians can spot opportunities while helping their customers at the same time. This resource should not be taken lightly or ignored.

Lastly, customer service skills should be a part of everyone's training plan. Customer Service Skills, when properly applied, improve customer satisfaction and improve customer retention. These skills do not cost money to learn, they actually save money! Keeping an existing customer happy is much cheaper than getting a new customer to join your company.

Customers are a valuable resource. This resource is not bound to your company and everyday your competition is planning ways to lure your customer away. Don't let your relationships with your customers get strained to the point that they will even consider going to your competition. Use your skills to keep them happy. Treat them well, offer good products and services, and use your employees, technical or otherwise, as ambassadors for your company!

If you can master that, you will enjoy a long and successful life in the service industry!

In closing, I would like to applaud you for just spending the time to read this publication. Just by reading it you have identified yourself as someone who realizes the importance of customer service skills.

That alone places you above the average technician. Take the time to learn the material presented in these pages. Modify it to suit your situation and implement the techniques. You'll find it time well spent!

Good Luck!

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

<http://www.customerservicetraininginstitute.com>