

Customer Service

The secret to competitive success is to give customer service so far above the customers' expectations that it becomes legendary. This service must be driven by "*customer needs and wants*" and be tied to *superior quality!*

Customer service is critical today more than ever because:

Competition is increasing, customers expect more, superior service means repeat customers and superior service is profitable!

The cost of customer service is minimal when the following is considered:

1. It costs five times more to go out and get a new customer than it does to maintain a present customer.
2. 91% of customers who complain will not buy again.
3. If a complaint is handled properly, within 48 hours, 82-95% of these customers will return.

Why is customer service so poor in so many companies?

Companies are inwardly focused, not customer focused. This means that companies tend to be product/service driven, not customer driven.

Furthermore, companies see customer service as an extra and generally as the responsibility of only front-line personnel. Excellent customer service is not often measured, recognized or rewarded.

In order to be successful, we must sell our goods and services at a profit and still satisfy our customers.

If we satisfy our customer but fail to make a profit, we will soon be out of business.

If we get the profit but fail to satisfy the customer, we will soon be out of customers.

The secret of doing both lies in the word **SERVICE**. Service means doing something so valuable for the customer that he is glad to pay a price that allows us to make a profit.

Keeping your customers happy is probably the most important job your company has.

If customers feel good about your company and the products or services it provides, they will not only be less inclined to switch suppliers, they will be more inclined to increase the amount of business they do with you. In today's hyper-competitive marketplace, keeping customers happy requires more than just "doing your job." You must make customers feel that they are getting what they paid for, and more. And you must avoid becoming complacent and taking customers for granted.

How can you go about keeping your customers happy? Here are four steps that will move you in the right direction:

Stay in regular contact with customers.

This could mean regularly calling them on the phone to "check in" or making sure to meet face-to-face occasionally as appropriate. Another idea is to send along articles you may read in trade media that relate to your customer's business. It also means responding immediately to calls from customers. One of the most irritating things to customers is not being called back in a timely way.

Seek out specific feedback on your company's performance.

Don't just ask generally, "How are we doing?" Ask instead, "What could we be doing more effectively? What specifically could we be doing to make our product or service more valuable to you?"

Continually develop new ways to add value.

Customers tend to have short memories and are inclined to ask, "What have you done for me today?" Your job is to

continually improve your product or service, and to let your customers know what you have accomplished. Write them letters, or send out newsletters. Customers want to be reassured that they are buying from people who are constantly adding value.

Avoid adversarial relationships.

When conflicts threaten to flare--such as over prices or delivery schedules--try to discover the real cause, rather than getting your back up. It might be said that while the customer isn't always right, the customer is never wrong, or at least should never be told he or she is wrong. You may not be able to do everything the customer asks for, but at least give the impression that you are listening to complaints and trying to rectify them.

Keeping your customers happy is much cheaper in the long run than finding new customers. And it is the secret to growing your company.

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