

The Five Critical Elements of Customer Service

Notes by:

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1. AWARENESS

This is the Holy Grail of customer service. It is the beginning and the end concept. If you cannot grasp or train yourself in this, your other efforts will never have anywhere near your desired impact and energy spent in other promotional endeavors will be for not if your awareness is lacking. You can send out all the bird letters in the world, but if you set up a meeting with a potential seller and walk into their home with your muddy boots, you've just wasted a lot of postage.

It is a proven fact that for most people value is more important than price (money) and these **5 Critical Elements** are the key principles that build your business and add value to your customer's experience. Notice your business and life environment. See a need and address it. The vast majority of people hate to ask for help...don't make them. If you have a seller on a piece of property see what they aren't saying as much as what they are. Is the house just an irritating obligation, or do they have a great deal of emotion attached to the home? Don't assume or presume that the same outward scenario warrants the same game plan. Deal with the people not the picture. Know and notice the difference.

Example: you could have a twin set of scenarios where all outward appearances are the same. An adult child has lost their parent and needs to sell their home for any number of reasons. Can't afford to keep it, they live too far away to maintain it, etc., etc. One seller may just want you to rescue them from the whole affair and just make the hassle go away as quickly as possible. Another may want to spend copious hours in an unhurried fashion pouring through every belonging in the house and lovingly recalling every conceivable memory. Same scenario, but your awareness needs to tell you to handle each situation completely differently. But what incredible volumes would it speak to either client if you found an old photo in the house and had it professionally restored and framed and presented it to them as a thank you gift at closing.

Opportunities to make people feel special are everywhere. All that being said, Awareness is a difficult concept to teach so if you don't think it is your strong suit, involve someone in your business that has an Awareness radar to beat the band. This concept tends to fall into the category of "If I have to explain it to you, you wouldn't understand." This asks you to incorporate an understanding of body language, gut instinct and perceptiveness. Don't underestimate the value of a woman's intuition here. So either be that person or find someone who is, your business and life will be the better for it...guaranteed.

Another important Awareness as a small business owner is your professionalism and the image you convey to others. Have professional looking business cards, letter head and the like. Have quality note cards at the ready so you can send *HAND WRITTEN* thank you notes, birthday cards, anniversary wishes, etc. on a regular basis. Certain life events warrant an effort beyond that which Hallmark can manage. Weddings, babies being born, these occasions require special attention.

Little touches go a long way. (Fruit plate waiting when u check into a hotel room) notice what people eat, drink, etc.

Neighbor's garbage cans

Plaque at clinic asking for feedback & gift baskets

Nice packaging/letterhead/note cards

Teacher gifts...script or something that says I've thought about you and put time, energy effort and \$ into this. Greg just talked about Abie, "if it's convenient it's not giving."

If someone has u over for dinner do you enjoy their company and a nice meal or do you do the dishes?

Charging me \$0.25 for a cup of hot water...are you kidding me?

Gap Kids. Can you keep your children with you? Well done

"Treat Receipt" at Starbucks "We don't have a button for that."

It costs 5x as much to gain a new customer as it does to keep an existing one.

2. **ACTION**

Awareness without action is meaningless. It is a dead end street and a waste of effort. You must notice what your customer's wants and needs are. Anticipate their desires and don't just deliver...over deliver. Every time. All the time. Awareness and Action should be inseparable from one another. If you notice a need tend to it immediately. Don't let enough time go by that you forget or that the moment for a gesture or acknowledgement has passed. Be generous to a fault; not just in your business, but everywhere in your life and this karma (for lack of a better word), will pay the most wonderful dividends. You will impact others and be an example to them, you will have people wanting to work with and do business with you, and you will love the way it makes you feel about what you stand for and represent.

I'm not a big fan of gift cards because while they occasionally have a place, what they largely say to me is, "I didn't want to

spend the time to be really thoughtful and creative, so here's a gift card to Applebee's instead."

Upon first meeting a customer or client, the Action they expect from you is knowledgeable professionalism. That's it.

Anything besides a sincere thank you note at that point would be inappropriate. But if you meet with a seller a second, third or tenth time, make your actions increasingly personal.

Example:

"I know you are beyond busy so I've arranged it with my title rep who is more than happy to stay late or they can come to your office to get the paperwork done. You tell me what makes this easiest for you."

"Hey, I passed this fantastic fruit market on my way over here and they had the most amazing looking raspberries so I grabbed you some."

"Thanks for meeting with me so early. I brought some great coffee and the most decadent croissants to make up for the hour I know you had to get up this morning."

"I know you've got your hands full, but I bet if I show up with enough bubbles and play dough we'll get through this meeting in fine form. What do ya think?"

But Awareness and Action have and deserve a place everywhere in your life.

If someone has you over for dinner, do the dishes and clean up?
Write someone a card or give a follow up phone call just because you were thinking about *them*?

Acknowledge a barista that knows your name and your drink by heart?

Have your Outlook, Blackberry, I-Phone...whatever reminds you of friends and clients birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

Drop people hand written thank you notes.

Green tea brought to me at restaurants we frequent without me asking for it every time.

Les Schwab reputation (kids coming home with little toys)

3. **EMPATHY**

Get out of your moment and into somebody else's frame of mind.

Do you have a stressed out frustrated seller you are working with? A nervous first time homebuyer? A mom trying to entertain kids while trying to shop?

Irritating example #1: Stopping at a store and employees having a personal chit-chat. Such as stopping for coffee and the employees are discussing their weekend plans. Not asking you about *your* weekend plans mind you...discussing theirs and asking you three times, "what did you order again?" Was the quadruple latte just ordered not a glaring enough hint that I don't have the time or the patience for this? Realize that most of America is in a hurry. Employees should interact with the customer, not one another. People consider a 90 second wait in person too long and are less forgiving when on the phone so be aware of this reality for them. Prompt attention, quick return phone calls; ask them "when is the best time to call you?"

Proactive attention to their concerns should be the order of the day...always. All these things let them know you are aware of ***them***. If you and what you offer aren't the right fit refer them to someone who is. You won't have an immediate customer or client, but you have conveyed sincerity and your concern for their best interests and it will return itself to you tenfold.

If you are partnered with your spouse terrific, if not consider asking for input here. At the risk of generalizing, Mom's are empathy engines. They do it without even realizing it because they spend the lion's share of their time catering to and anticipating the needs of their kids. This is a tremendous skill set to tap into.

People are stressed out enough these days, the last thing they need is a stressful experience with your business.

We all know the saying that the customer is always right and we all know that this is like swallowing castor oil at times, but I think on the Dr. Phil quote. Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy? Modified to: do you want to be right or do you want to build your business?

Panera bread has created an entire business model around the idea of empathy. Respect each customer, clients, subcontractor, and team member. Meet them where THEY are at.

4. EDUCATION

If you are running your own business you absolutely must be incredibly educated about your product and or service. If you have employees it is essential that you train them well and educate them enough to be empowered to make the right decisions.

It is written that having an employee say, “That’s just not our policy”, or “if we did that for you we’d have to do that for all our customers,” is akin to lighting a match and burning your business.

It costs 5x as much to get a new customer or client as it does to keep and existing customer. If you ever want to achieve any sort of passive income you must be educated enough to maintain your customer base by continually offering them something of value.

80% of business comes from 20% of customers. Retail statistic, but it holds true for other industries as well. You **cannot** underestimate or over appreciate the power of Word of Mouth. In this day and age, technology has leveled the playing field between small companies and large businesses. Now a person isn’t just going to vent a bad experience to their neighbor, they are going to share it with their 500 friends on Face book. But the reverse is also true and can work in your favor and you

should constantly be mindful of this. A personal referral or recommendation is the best advertising you could “buy.”

Other things to pay close attention to:

Is your website pleasing to look at and easy to negotiate?

Ask for, value and act on your customers opinions and feedback. They will appreciate the sincerity and have an increased desire to support you and your business. Their direct feedback will allow you the best guidance on what to do to build and streamline your business.

Education works both ways though. Not only should you and your employees be extremely knowledgeable about your business, you should offer similar value to your customers and clients.

My Newsletter at Trilogy Farm

Chad’s Newsletter “Coach Carson”

Keep information updated, accurate and flowing both ways

5. APPRECIATION

Value your customers in meaningful ways. Know their first names. Know something about them i.e. Don’t ship Omaha steaks to your vegan client. Ship products overnight and don’t charge them for it (Zappos). Offer them something of *value* in return for their business and loyalty.

Discounts for something they actually need. Write a thank you note to every client you meet with. DO NOT email them expressing your appreciation.

Examples:

Christmas gifts at Trilogy Farm

Clinic participant gifts

Every year the kids school sends home countless flyers asking parents to buy “Script” for teachers for Christmas, Easter, Teacher Appreciation Day, End of the Year gifts, Arbor Day,

Canadian Boxing Day (you get the idea, the solicitation is endless). But instead of falling in lockstep I am going to pick my moments and make my show of appreciation meaningful. I'm not going to write a check for \$100 for some mass gift card (script). If I feel inclined to show my appreciation I'm going to do it in a sincere, meaningful and personal way. Similarly if you send out Christmas cards to clients, DO NOT send out preprinted cards with no personal acknowledgement or note to specifically who each card is being sent to. Preprinting cards, with nothing but your name scribbled at the bottom and a computer generated address label on the envelope redefine lame, not to mention lazy. If this is part of your program, spend the \$ on something else. This sort of thing just offends people.

I want to stress that 99 times out of 100 Customer Services costs you little beyond the time to think and be aware. What money to do spend in this direction will be insignificant to the exponentially positive impact it will have on your life, relationships and business. All businesses in the end are about people, and there are certain undeniable truths that we are so much better off to be aware of. I actually hope and imagine that Customer Service will be one of the most enjoying and rewarding business tasks that you take on on a daily basis. And when you incorporate these ideas into your personal life and relationships, the rewards will be even more gratifying.