CUSTOMER SERVICE | CUSTOMERS | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | TAKING ACTION

5 Service Excellence Principles to Propel Your Profits

Five strategies for creating jaw-dropping customer service that results in consistently happy customers

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Success leaves clues. Every time I interview a highly effective company, certain principles keep showing up, regardless of the size or type of business. Those elements can be applied to your company and lead you to uncommon success. Here are five principles to make a name for yourself and your company through service excellence.

Principle #1: Offer low pressure, high pleasure experiences

The Green Company is a building and developing company that has an impressive 97.5% of customers saying they would recommend them to others. Fifty-five percent of their sales come from buyer referrals. They attribute this to their extensive efforts at nurturing relationships. Customers don't feel like they're being "sold." They are treated to a pleasurable experience (including fresh baked cookies) and a caring, attentive staff who have developed specific ways to show they care before, during AND after the sale.

Principle #2: Know how to answer the question: "Who are you?"

When I interviewed Andrew Androff at Professional Movers of Walled Lake, Michigan, one of the most powerful statements he made was this:

> **"We really aren't a moving company. We're a customer service company that happens to move." Know in your bones that**

you are a customer service company and your customers will feel the difference.

When I conduct full-day customer service training, I like to start with a group activity. Every attendee is asked to answer the question, “Who am I?” The question is asked over and over and over again. At first the answers are predictable:

Who are you? “I’m Steve Smith.”
Who are you? “I’m a department manager.”
Who are you? “I’m someone who’s worked at the company for 2 years.”

In less than a minute, their answers start going much deeper as they get in touch with who they really are:

Who are you? “I’m a problem solver.”
Who are you? “I am a caring person.”
Who are you? “I am someone who wants to do a good job and make a difference.”

Are you clear about who you are, and how it contributes to the customer experience? It can make a profound difference.

Principle 3: Excel at Service When You Aren’t Even There

Did you know there are passive ways to give great customer service? When my coauthor and I were lining up interviews with companies that excel at customer service, I called Steve at ISCO Industries, his answering machine picked up the call. When I heard his message, I knew he deserved his great title of Director of Customer Care.

Anticipating what his customers might feel when they get a recorded message; he crafted his message to bring relief and reassurance. ”I check my phone messages frequently throughout the day, he said in his outgoing voice mail recording. I knew Steve was someone who would get back with me soon. Sure enough,” ten minutes later, he returned my call.

I was inspired by this skillful action, as even when he isn’t available to answer his telephone personally, he knows that customers appreciate responsiveness. It had me thinking about those automatic response emails we all get from time to time when a colleague is away from the office. They’re most helpful when they inform us of the person’s expected return date and offer another contact person for immediate service.

After my call with Steve, I immediately changed my phone message to include, "...I check my phone messages frequently throughout the day". Soon afterward, I played back my messages and was delighted to hear, Marilyn, I simply love your answering machine message. It feels so good!" Adding a line of reassurance is a subtle difference that shows you'll be responsive. The stream of good feelings that it generates will help you create happy, loyal customers.

Principle #4: Attitude trumps experience

You can have 20 years experience in your field, have tons of education, and a good work ethic, but if your attitude is off-putting to customers, your company will suffer. Peggy Wynne Borgan of the luxurious Preston Wynne Spa, in Sarasota, California, picks attitude over experience every time she hires. During my interview with her, she said, "We can't fix what their parents didn't get right."

> **She has discovered that you can't take someone who doesn't share your core values and expect them to fit in to your company culture.**

I ran into this myself while doing some customer service training for a company going through transition. During my time with them, it became apparent that one manager had a defeatist attitude and the negativity was affecting morale (and no doubt, the customer experience.) It's fine when an employee stirs the pot by posing challenging questions, as long as she has a team-player attitude. Those challenging questions can help steer a company in an even better direction. This person did not. Instead, he resented the extra work that the company changes were causing him. He sucked the energy right out of the room, rather than rolling up his sleeves and appreciating the opportunity the changes would offer their customers and staff in the long run.

A bad attitude is contagious. Even inspired leaders can catch and spread it. By being aware of how you feel and the message you're sending, you'll be quick to shift into a more productive state of mind.

Principle 5: Apply service excellence in the details of every customer touch point

During my interviews with Singapore Airlines, I discovered that nothing is arbitrary about customer service. While six weeks of training is the airline industry standard, they spend five months training their flight attendants.

Investing time on the subtleties and nuances that go into creating jaw-dropping customer service results in consistently happy customers, sold out flights, and the highest ticket prices in the airline industry. These are the happy side effects that occur when customer service is a non-negotiable part of the company culture.

Marilyn Suttle is the co-author of the best-selling customer service book, “Who’s Your Gladys? How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan.” She is president of Suttle Enterprises, a personal and professional growth training firm through which she has taught thousands how to have happier, more productive relationships with customers, coworkers, and even their children. For more information visit: www.WhosYourGladys.com.