

4 ESSENTIALS EVERY EMPLOYEE NEEDS TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

BY BILL HOGG

This is the first in a series of six articles that will examine different aspects of delivering exceptional customer service and how it leads to increased overall profitability.

Over the 6 part series, we'll discuss techniques that you can implement to improve the performance of your employees -- always with an eye firmly fixed on improved profitability

This first article is focused on 4 key elements that your employees need so they can provide superior customer service to the people they come into contact with on a daily basis, whether it's on the telephone or in person.

Attitude Is The Key

A positive attitude cannot be taught -- it is part of our hardwiring. Employees need the right attitude when they're at work because a negative attitude is like a cancer that spreads quickly. A positive attitude can also spread quickly but that's a good thing.

Your attitude affects the work you do and your relationship with fellow workers, customers and management. If your attitude is bad, then you're not going to do well in any service environment.

Don't let other people's bad attitude rub off on you either. It's easy to let it happen if they're particularly loud or overbearing. Keep things light and you'll reap positive rewards, maybe not today, but down the track.

Customer service is a people business. Some of them may be angry or upset, but it is our job to deal with those emotions. Keeping a positive helpful attitude will help.

Empathy

To help customers get what they want; we first need to empathize with them -- to put ourselves in their shoes to better understand what they want. We need to treat every customer as an individual instead of a number. We need to treat every customer as if they were the only one for the day.

You may have dealt with 30 customers before this one but they don't know that. Nor do they need to know it because it's not their concern.

Show them you care about their problem; that you are there to help them achieve a successful outcome for themselves. Without this key characteristic, an employee can never be taught how to provide exceptional customer service.

Accountability

Regardless of who is at fault concerning a customer issue -- if anyone -- each employee must accept accountability to deal with the issue. Customers don't care who made the mistake -- they simply want things fixed or their problem solved.

Accountability isn't about blame; it's about finding resolution for a customer who is unhappy with your product or service. Often a simple apology on behalf of the organization if the customer is unhappy will start the process of customer recovery -- then the employee can take action to correct the situation.

187 Willow Farm Lane
Aurora, Ontario L4G 6K5
(905) 841-3191
bill@billhogg.ca
www.billhogg.ca



BILL
HOGG
& ASSOCIATES

As the representative of the organization, the customer is counting on each employee to make things right. Even if the employee can't personally resolve the issue, they should be able to make sure the customer gets to speak to the person who can.

Product Knowledge and Training

The first thing all employees must have before they interact with your customer is the appropriate on-boarding training and product knowledge. It doesn't matter if they've worked for a similar company or industry before, they're now representing **your** business -- and resultant, should do things in a manner that reflects **your** values.

Employees must have the necessary training material/manuals so they can do their job properly. But it's not enough to simply hand them a book and send them out to do battle. You have to go through the material with them so they gain an understanding of **what** to do -- and also **why** they do it.

"What" to do is the rational side of the equation. The technical on-boarding may take a few hours or a few weeks, depending on the nature of the job. Some roles require on-the-job training and that's fine -- but everyone should know where to find information if they need it, quickly and efficiently, so customers aren't kept waiting and are only given the correct information.

The other side of the equation is "why" -- the emotional side. The emotional on-boarding may require more time and ongoing reinforcement and should build on the attitude that was identified during the hiring process. Spending time with co-workers who demonstrate the brand values through their behaviours is also essential -- as are the stories that are shared across the organization about how we treat one another and our customers.

Understanding the values that informed your decisions when you developed your branded customer experience is often more important than simply knowing the process -- because it ensures the employee starts to think like you and understand what motivates the organization.

Without this emotional connection with your organization -- they will only follow direction and will never become a true ambassador for your organization. Only once these values are ingrained, will employees treat all customers in a manner consistent with your organizational values.

Keep these 4 things in mind when thinking about potential employees. The first 3 are essential elements of their character and the fourth is your responsibility. Without these 4 key elements, you will never have a strong customer service culture in your organization.

In our next article, we will be covering why *Employees need Guidelines, not just Rules.*

Performance Excelsator™ | Leadership Expert | Professional Speaker

*Bill is recognized as the **Performance Excelsator™** because of his uncanny ability to create profound change and deliver extraordinary results with the most demanding organizations. He works with senior leaders to inspire and develop high-performance teams that deliver exceptional customer service, higher productivity and improve profits.*

Bill is passionate about results and works only with clients who share that passion -- ready to take steps to achieve immediate, significant and continuous improvement. Whether working with boards or operations teams and employees, his no-excuse approach breaks down the silos and gains consensus and clarity throughout the organization.

Bill Hogg provides dynamic keynote presentations, transformative workshops, and world class executive consulting.

For additional information email [bill \[at\] billhogg \[dot\] ca](mailto:bill@billhogg.ca) or visit us online at www.billhogg.ca where you can sign up to receive an article like this each month or download [Bill's 1-sheet](#).

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