

6 VALUABLE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING TIPS

BY BILL HOGG

There are many different aspects of work as a customer service representative, regardless of whether it's face-to-face or on the telephone. Understanding some of the key tips that improve customer service will enable staff to do their job better.

Make people feel welcome

People should always feel welcome when they enter your store or office, regardless of the reason. If they call, they should also be greeted with a friendly voice. This helps people feel more comfortable and the likelihood of them using your services is far greater.

Listen first

You can't hope to provide great service unless you know what your customers want. Ask questions and listen to what they say. Give them your undivided attention and then help them to the best of your ability. Remember that all customers are different. This means their requirements may also be different, even if only slightly. If it's within your power, you should help give them exactly what they need.

Say yes as often as possible

Some customers ask for things that may not be considered "normal" but could still be possible. Never say no unless something is impossible -- and even then provide an alternative if possible. If you don't know if something can be done, check with your supervisor before giving a final answer. Then the customer will know that you have at least tried.

Don't be afraid to apologize

Things can sometimes go wrong, whether it's your fault or not. However, you're a representative of the company and if something has gone wrong, offer a sincere apology immediately on behalf of the organization. Customers appreciate acknowledgement of errors and once the apology has been made, you can then help remedy the situation so the customer ends up being a happy one.

Follow-up

If a customer is unhappy, try and help them. That's a given. However, what often happens is that follow-up promises aren't kept. If you promise to do something, it's imperative that you do it. If you promise to return a call on a specific date and time, do it even if it's to report that you don't yet have the answer the customer needs. They'll usually be prepared to wait longer if you're honest and keep the lines of communication open.

Phone tips

In addition to the previous tips, there are some that specifically apply to people dealing with customers on the phone. Your phone manner is extremely important. You should always be courteous, polite, calm and

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positive. You're there to help the customer, no matter what issue they have. Avoid using jargon when dealing with a customer as they probably won't know what you're talking about and that will only make them more frustrated and angry.

It's a common thing to have to place someone on hold. Ask them if it is okay to do so and make sure you keep coming back to them if they have to wait a while. There's nothing worse than being on hold and listening to the same droning company messages over and over again, or even worse, getting cut off.

If you have to transfer someone, make sure it's a warm transfer. Introduce them to your colleague and explain the situation before letting them take over the call. Transferring someone into another queue where they end up having to explain the same problem all over again is the quickest way to make your customer angry.

If you get an angry or upset customer, let them vent. Someone else may have placed them in the queue and so they're already upset when you answer the phone. Although it's not your fault, apologize in a calm voice and tell them that you'll endeavour to solve their problem if they can just explain it to you clearly.

Customer service doesn't have to be complicated. Quite often it's employees that make it that way through bad behaviour -- or simply not caring enough to look after customer needs. If expectations are set early and staff are given the proper training, angry or upset customers will be kept to a minimum.

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*Bill is recognized as the **Performance Excelerator™** 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.

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