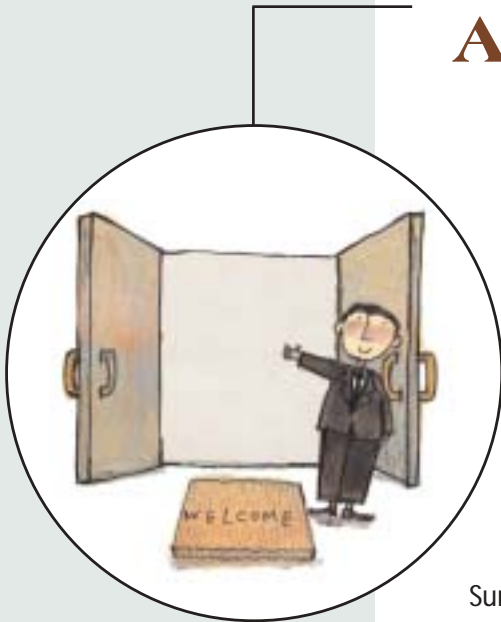


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Are Your Customers Always Right?

"The purpose of a business is to attract and keep a customer."

Harvard Business School
Professor Theodore Levitt



According to Zemke & Anderson's research (see Resources you can use), as many as 25% of your customers are currently dissatisfied enough to consider doing business with someone else.

Without customers, there is no business. Obvious, right? Yet many employees take their customers for granted. In today's competitive business climate, failure to listen and respond to your customers can be fatal.

Sure, you have a quality product. But quality products don't differentiate you enough from your competition. They get you in the game. The standard is very high. Levels of customer service, on the other hand, vary widely. That's the real opportunity for making a difference!

Everyone has experienced the satisfaction of exceptional customer service from someone, somewhere, sometime. And they remember it. They want it from you. They measure the quality of your customer service against the highest standard experienced somewhere else. They're looking for it. They'll reward it with their loyalty.

Creating a Customer Service Culture

Calculate the value of a satisfied customer to your company's bottom line.

- What is the average annual revenue from one satisfied customer?
- How many other new customers will that one person introduce to your organization in a year?
- What does it cost you to attract one new customer to your organization?

The formula for success in the 21st century:

Be easy to do business with.

Communication Skills and Customer Service

Whether you are communicating with internal or external customers, you will be more effective if you develop the skills to:

- **Listen attentively (without simply waiting to talk)**
- **Speak clearly, avoiding technical terms or fancy words**
- **Handle criticism without taking it personally**
- **Diffuse emotions and soothe ruffled feathers**
- **Adjust to different customer types**
- **Be consistent: reasonable, firm, pleasant, mature and professional**



Communicate this value to every employee in your organization.

Count the cost of a dissatisfied customer to your company's bottom line.

- What is the average annual revenue lost by one customer's dissatisfaction?
- How many satisfied customers will this person convince to leave?
- How many potential customers will he or she influence to stay away?
- What will it cost you to attract the new customers to replace the ones that have left because of one dissatisfied customer?

Clarify this cost to every employee in your organization.

Concentrate on providing superior customer service as a company goal.

Customize efficient systems and processes. Monitor and adjust them with the customer's needs in mind.

Most dissatisfied customers will not take the time to complain – to you. But you can be sure they will eventually vent to someone!

Make it easy for customers to let you know what's wrong and what's right.

Regularly ask customers what one thing they would most want you to improve. Listen carefully and take steps to implement change.

Customer satisfaction begins at home.

Customer satisfaction requires employee satisfaction. Satisfying the "internal customer" is the necessary foundation to create a customer-focused culture.

Do your people:

- Feel valued as though they were customers?
- Treat each other as valued customers?
- Respond to internal voice mail and email correspondence promptly?
- Recognize how each department contributes to customer satisfaction?
- Work in harmony for your customer?

'DISCover' Customer Preferences!

Hire an Attitude

Hire people with the right attitude. It's easier to train people in technical skills than to instill the right customer service attitude. Herb Kelleher of Southwest Airlines says, "People who can fly airplanes are a dime a dozen. People with great attitudes aren't."

(from Best Practices in Customer Service, edited by Ron Zemke and John A. Woods, 1998, HRD press.)

All customers are not alike. They have different expectations, needs and views of what's important. They are also different in the way they would like to be treated by you. If you have a method for quickly assessing their 'type', you will be able to handle their complaints in a way that is compatible with their style.

The DISC model is highly effective in improving your customer service skills.

In our one-day customer service workshop*, you learn how to:

- Map service expectations of each style
- Understand dissatisfied responses of each style
- Respond effectively to each style
- Successfully handle difficult customer interactions
- Recognize and handle customer styles on the telephone
- Utilize and manage the strengths and tendencies of your own style when interacting with customers

**This is an excellent follow-up to our Developing Team Effectiveness workshop.*

When using your Managing for Success assessment tools to hire for customer service positions, look for the following behavioural tendencies:

- Patience and calm demeanor
- Natural tendency to listen carefully
- Ability to follow-through, keep promises
- Willingness to offer a fair resolution to a problem (accountability)
- Desire to empathize
- Optimistic attitude

Resources you can use:

Knock Your Socks off Service by Authors Ron Zemke and Kristin Anderson, (3rd edition to be released October 2002). This is one of a series of practical, easy-to-read books crammed with helpful customer service tactics for immediate use.

Would you like to recommend a book or resource?

Please just send a review and why you like it and we'll post your recommendation!