

# TRAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES

## Keep Them Running Smoothly



CANADIAN  
**Manager**  
CANADIAN

**I**t's a situation that has baffled me for years: Why do we take better care of our equipment than we do our people?

When a computer breaks down or slows down, we fix it or replace it. But, when an employee isn't performing as anticipated, most of us shrug our shoulders and do nothing. This is particularly puzzling when you realize that it is our people — our employees — who make the difference between the success and failure of our businesses.

While technology certainly can speed up our transactions and offer customers the convenience of doing business with us 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world, it is our employees who provide the customer service that differentiates us from our competitors and has a positive impact on our bottom line. Let's face it, if you are selling the same products or services for the same price as your competitors are, the only way you can differentiate yourself is with customer service. And the key to providing superior customer service is having well-trained, well-cared-for employees.

All too often, management is out of touch with the day-to-day activity of the business and doesn't have a clear picture of how customers are being treated. Yet it is that activity — that interaction between customers and frontline employees — that creates a company's reputation for good — or bad — customer service. And, unfortunately, many companies send their frontline employees out onto the floor with little or no training — and even less management support. You can spend all the money you want on adver-



By John Tschohl

tising and get customers to do business with you-*once*. Then the question becomes, how do you get them to return to you time and time again? Simple. Train your employees to be knowledgeable about your products and services, to provide the best customer service possible, and to treat your customers well.

If your business is to survive, you must expend the time, energy, and money to ensure that your employees are proficient at their jobs and that they are providing the type of customer service that will set your company apart from your competitors. Now, before you start complaining that your budget already is straining at the seams, consider this: A good training program not only increases productivity, it increases customer loyalty and saves you the cost of advertising to attract new customers.

Here are some simple steps you can take to ensure that your employees provide superior customer service and keep your customers coming back to you:

■ **Communication, cooperation and commitment** from top-level management to front-line employees are critical if you really want to change your company's culture. Don't just talk about

customer service; give your employees the tools and skills that will enable them to do their jobs effectively and efficiently.

■ **Devote 10 percent of your marketing budget to training your employees.** And train every employee and supervisor in the company. When you take the time and make the investment to train your employees, they feel valued. And employees who feel valued are more motivated and more productive.

■ **Spend a minimum of 40 hours each year training each employee in the art of customer service.** To effect a behavior change and a commitment to service standards, give each employee a minimum of six hours of service education, with a follow-up session a month or two later. Keep enthusiasm high by introducing a new training program every six months. You can't dust off the same old training program you've used for the past 10 years and expect employees to learn something new and to be enthusiastic about it.

■ **Establish clear standards** so employees know what you want them to be able to do once they've completed the program. Also, routinely counsel and coach your employees. Support them with supervisors who care and listen, who counsel and coach their employees.

■ **Once you have trained your employees, keep them running smoothly with positive reinforcement and public praise.** Too often the only time

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employees get any attention from management is when they make a mistake. Recognition improves employees' self-esteem, which results in increased pride and productivity. It also will significantly improve your sales and profits.

- **Empower your employees.** Let them know they can bend and break the rules in order to serve the customer. Give them clear, but general, guidelines so they have room to maneuver and to think creatively. Give them the authority to handle customer complaints and concerns on the spot and to take care of the customer to the customer's satisfaction. Then allow them to use that authority by letting them know they won't be scolded or fired if they make a mistake in serving the customer.

Finally, if your employees are not treating your customers well, step back and take a good look at how you are treating those employees. It is crucial that you remember this: How you treat your employees is exactly how they will treat your customers.

With the increase in global competition, the importance of well-trained employees who provide superior service is crucial. If you want your employees to run as smoothly and to perform as well as your computer system and copy machines, train them and take good care of them.

*John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. Described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a "customer service guru," he has written several books on customer service, including e-Service, Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service, The Customer is Boss, and Ca\$hing In: Make More Money, Get a Promotion, Love Your Job. John also has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. His bi-weekly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. You can reach John at [www.customer-service.com](http://www.customer-service.com) 📧*