

# Sales and Service Excellence

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SALES/INFORMATION

## SERVICE/EXPERIENCES

# Customer Experiences

*Create great ones or recover fast.*



by John Tschohl

FOR DECADES I'VE WATCHED as leaders spend millions of dollars renovating their buildings while investing little in customer service. You'll get a higher ROI if you focus on improving customer service. Customers may make some decisions based on aesthetics, but they spend their money with businesses that provide excellent products and services at competitive prices—and that offer superior customer service.

Such service doesn't just happen. It requires training, commitment, and focus—and it requires changing employee attitudes and behaviors. You must train employees, including managers and supervisors, in the art of customer service. You must get the commitment of every employee to making customer service a priority.

In providing service that wows customers and keeps them coming back, the most important person is the frontline employee who has constant contact with your customers. Sadly, many employees feel they're underpaid and unappreciated. Hence, they have poor attitudes—and those attitudes show.

To improve your brand and image, you have to tune up your employees—get them to believe in themselves, believe in your organization, and love your customers. You must introduce a new and different customer service training program every four to six months to keep enthusiasm high and to realize maximum results.

When you train employees, you provide the skills they need to care for your customers, and you send a message that you care enough about your employees to invest time and money to give them the skills they need to be successful. When people feel valued, they'll perform at higher levels.

Let's dispel one myth: Money is not a motivator. While people deserve to be paid well, to improve employee attitudes you need to take four steps:

1. *Train every employee in the art of customer service.* Train them how to handle difficult situations and irate customers. Develop a cohesive team that is enthusiastic and productive and that will drive your business. Reinforce that

training with public praise and positive reinforcement. Employees need to know that you notice and appreciate their contributions. Also, train every supervisor on how to coach, nurture, and reinforce superior performance. When everyone works together to accomplish a valued objective, it builds team spirit and a customer-oriented culture.

2. *Build employees' self-worth and self-esteem.* The better people feel about themselves, the better they'll perform and treat customers. Self-imposed limitations are a major stumbling block; so help them to see themselves as they can be, not as they are. People have trouble overcoming difficult situations. Maybe Anne missed the bus this morning, or Mike broke up with his girlfriend last night, or Sam is living from paycheck to paycheck. Those situations affect their attitudes. Give them the skills and confidence to handle any situation—on and off the job.

3. *Teach your employees how to communicate positively.* When was the last time an employee smiled and called you by name? Remember, it's not what you say but how you say it. Train your employees to smile and make eye contact. Communication includes listening. Employees can't help customers unless they hear and understand what customers have to say and respond appropriately.

4. *When training employees, mix up the groups.* Often there is friction between departments. By improving communication, you improve morale and attitudes. Consider customer service training programs part of your maintenance package. When you train your employees at least twice a year, you'll improve their performance.

Invest in your employees. Train them well and reward them often.

### Wow Factor: Service Recovery

Keeping customers is vital today. No matter where you operate or what you sell, if you don't have service recovery, you fail. Developing a loyal customer base increases sales and profits and decreases what you must spend on marketing and advertising to attract new customers. In this economy, if you can lower your costs and increase your profits, you'll crush your

competition.

Service recovery prevents customer defections by solving a customer's problem and sending her away thinking she just did business with the greatest company. Service recovery is what you do after making a mistake to ensure that the situation is rectified and that the customer is satisfied. The first step is realizing that in each customer complaint is a chance to win that customer's long-term loyalty.

Service recovery will result in customers who are so loyal to you that they won't do business with anyone else. You drastically reduce your marketing costs, because your word-of-mouth advertising will be so strong. When you do something great for a customer, that customer will tell all his friends, family, and coworkers.

*So, train everyone in service recovery.* Your frontline employees can add the "wow" factor by solving customers' problems quickly. Teach them to take responsibility for the mistake without blaming someone and to take steps to solve the problem. Do role-playing so employees can test and refine skills.

Empower employees to bend or break the rules to do what they have to do to satisfy customers. Most employees fear being reprimanded or fired for making a mistake while trying to satisfy customers. Let them know that you support them and their efforts to solve customers' problems. Eliminate policies and procedures that get in the way.

Compensation. Beyond solving the customers' problems, you should give them something of value that says, "We're sorry you had this problem, we value you, and we want to keep you as a customer." Give customers something that doesn't cost a lot but has value in their eyes and draws them back to you. Identify five products or services you can give to dissatisfied customers.

Customer service is the only thing that will separate you from competitors. Provide superior service—and service recovery—and your sales will soar. **SSE**

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**ACTION:** Invest in service quality and recovery.