

MANAGING FOR SUCCESS

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

IBD

MONDAY SPECIAL

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The Art Of Exceeding Expectations

CUSTOMER SERVICE

For John Tschohl, service doesn't end when you fulfill a customer's request. The real magic occurs after you ask, "What can I do to make your experience with us even better?"

By learning what it takes to totally satisfy customers, you gain information to exceed their expectations. And that's how to earn their loyalty so they repeat-order and tell others of your superior service.

"The goal is to have overhappy customers," said Tschohl, president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis. "They may be happy if you give them what they expect. But do more than that and they'll really be delighted."

Exceeding expectations can be as simple as smiling and thanking a customer sincerely. It can also mean asking for feedback, throwing in freebies with a purchase or providing additional service that goes beyond the call of duty. If you linger at a fast-food restaurant and an employee approaches your table and offers to remove your tray and discard your trash, that can leave an impression.

Many employees want to exceed

John Tschohl



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customer expectations. But unless they receive training, they may lack the skills to deliver superior service. Tschohl suggests that employees learn to:

■ **Connect past and present.** Customers appreciate employees who recognize and remember them. Greetings such as, "Great to see you again so soon" or "I enjoyed chatting with you when you were here last week" make customers feel important.

■ **Get smarter.** Customers with questions want answers, pronto. If they cannot find a knowledgeable employee, they may give up and go elsewhere. That's why it pays to educate your staff constantly about

your products and services.

For example, instruct employees to keep a list of questions that customers ask during the week. Then have them share the questions in a staff meeting so that everyone on your team knows the correct answers.

■ **Speak positively about customers — even when they're not around.** Never say a negative word about your customers. If you let slip just one complaint such as, "Some of those shoppers are so inconsiderate!" or "I know how rude those people can be," you may breed an anti-customer mind-set among your staff.

■ **Gauge customer behavior.** You can tell when you've exceeded a customer's expectations, says Tschohl. The shopper's receptive body language and appreciative voice tone can signal extreme satisfaction. Train employees to watch how customers respond in conversation, especially how they shift from their baseline behavior to show surprise or delight.

If a customer explains a problem by speaking in a fast tempo while grimacing, your employee should resolve the issue so that the customer walks away smiling and chatting at a relaxed pace. **Morey Stettner**