

Providing Exceptional Customer Service

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One of The Consulting Team's most popular courses is "Exceptional Customer Service." It stands to reason that if your organization provides a product or service, you will have customers and you will need to satisfy them.

At the same time, we must all ask ourselves, "How could great customer service be difficult to understand and provide? All of us are customers everyday."

We know how we like to be treated by those who serve us. We choose, consciously or unconsciously, whether we will continue to give an organization our business or find another way to meet our needs. When asked to fill out a survey about how well we have been treated, we can easily answer the questions. So why wouldn't we know, almost automatically, what our customers, clients, or citizens want? All we have to think about is what we would want and how we would like to be treated.

Let's look at what most people typically want when they are looking for a product, service, or answer—acknowledgement and a warm welcome. Even if you want to browse for a while, don't you like it better if an employee greets you in a friendly manner? When we make a phone call for service, don't we all like to be greeted by a friendly, helpful voice?

Yet many times we are put on hold when we call or we wait in a long service line with no acknowledgment. One client shared she had waited for over an hour on hold before a government service representative picked up her call.

The same holds true for our internal customers. When Jose calls on the phone to inquire about his health plan, he wants to feel acknowledged and that his question is a good one. He does

not want to hear “It’s in the handbook.” CLICK! It is even more crucial when a colleague calls with a customer on the other line who needs a quick answer only you can give. Your prompt and comprehensive service will help that colleague satisfy the customer and impress her or him with your organization’s teamwork and care.

All of our participants in our customer training classes agree with these **four basics of good customer service**:

- Make customers feel welcome and comfortable
- Listen and understand their needs
- Make them feel important and respected
- Ensure their needs are met

Think of the last time you experienced these basics, when you were treated like you mattered, and you received service that met your needs. Perhaps you tried a restaurant for the first time and vowed to return with friends because not only was the food delicious, but the wait staff made you feel as welcomed as an old friend, and the establishment was attractive and clean. How many people did you tell about how great your experience was? Or did you go on Yelp or Trip Advisor or any other website that invites you to rate your experience and give them five stars?

And if you are not satisfied with the service you received? Perhaps you received a notice from your city inspector that you were out of compliance with a municipal code that you never knew existed. You visit the designated office to learn how to fix the issue. After a long wait you come away still confused and unsure of how to avoid a pending fine.

We know that if customers have a negative experience they will complain about it to at least nine other people. On the internet it takes twelve positive experiences to make up for one negative, so it is easier to do it right the first time.

To refresh your skills try out one of the four basics of good customer service practices when you start work tomorrow.

Pick out the most frequent customer service task you provide. Is it providing accurate information or finding the perfect solution for a problem your customers need to solve? Or is it ensuring a rush completion of a service order? Put yourself in your customers' shoes and ask, "How would I like to be greeted?" "How would I like to be treated?" "What would I expect as good service in this situation?"

In some cases, "going the extra mile" may be required, especially in emergency situations, where health or safety is concerned. It may be as dramatic as rescuing someone from fire or flood. Or it may be just an early dispatch of a repairperson to ensure some equipment is working for a key meeting.

Think about situations in which someone calls and asks you a question that may be difficult to answer but that you know is an important piece of information. If it were you making that call, what would be the first thing you would want to hear? How much time would you be willing to wait to get the correct answer? How would you feel if you were passed to someone else or given an incomplete or wrong answer?

There is no mystery to exceptional customer service. It's really as easy as applying the Golden Rule to any situation: *Treat your customers as you like your service providers to treat you. Always give them more than they expect.*