



# **Leadership Tips**

## **August 2018:**

### **Get to the Heart of Customer Service**

Contact:  
**The Consulting Team**  
650-965-3663  
Marilyn@TheConsultingTeam.com



## **Get To The Heart of Customer Service:**

### **Putting People First in the Public Sector**



We were consulting for a client from Latin America whose name was spelled Eugenia. In our one-on-one meetings, one of us kept pronouncing her name "You-Gene-E-Ah" and the interaction felt strictly transactional. She answered the phone one day while we were working together and pronounced her name "O-Hee-Nee-Ya." We took note. Once we began pronouncing her name properly, our interactions felt much more personal and became productive too. She hadn't told us that we were pronouncing her name incorrectly...but neither had we asked. Lesson learned.

You may think customer service requires a huge capital outlay for expensive training or fancy CRM software. Yet the core of customer success comes from the heart. Heartfelt customer service derives from caring, putting people first, and acting in an openhearted manner. When you serve with your heart, customers feel valued and well cared for, and a true partnership is formed.

### **The basics of serving from the heart**

- **Listening.** The heart of customer service derives from great listening. In addition to listening for the facts of complaints, listen for the emotional component of complaints. Listen to the concepts behind the words. Listen between the lines for what is unspoken, but implied. The embedded meta-message may provide the key to resolving a problem a customer shares with you. Become an active listener and listen with your eyes, mind and heart as well as your ears. And here's a secret: customers won't be as happy with you solving their problem if you haven't sufficiently listened to and acknowledged their complaint and related pain first.

*When you hear customers say "Thank you for listening to my experience" or "Finally, I've reached someone who hears my problem and understands how it's impacting my family" you know you've listened effectively.*

- **Expressing Empathy.** Most customers likely don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Express empathy to let customers know that you feel their pain, understand their frustration, and recognize their suffering. Once you convey that sincerely, they will willingly partner with you on a satisfactory solution. Tip: never fake empathy. Try to step into their shoes and experience the situation from their perspective. Halfhearted expressions of empathy fall flat and may do more damage than good.

*When an agitated business owner on the phone becomes calmer, it's because the empathy you expressed shows them that you and your staff truly care. Now they're more receptive to partnering on a solution.*

- **Smiling.** It doesn't cost a cent to smile at your customers, constituents, co-workers and the general public. It actually takes fewer muscles than frowning. And we know smiling is contagious too. A smile really is

the shortest distance between strangers in every country. And smiling breaks the ice in many types of situations: over a counter, in the field or even on the phone. (Did you know smiling while talking on the phone can be "heard" by your calling partner?)

*Words ring hollow when they're betrayed by contradictory body language across a counter, in the field, or at a town hall meeting. Your smile breaks down barriers and reminds people your organization and its staff is partnering with them, advocating for them, and is poised to serve.*

- **Use Magic Words.** Use words and phrases that please your customers. Among their favorites:
  - "Yes, we'd be glad to."
  - "What else can we do for you?"
  - "It would be our pleasure."
  - Hearing their own name.

Make sure to use their preferred name. When in doubt, ask them. But remember, it only impresses when you pronounce their name properly.

*Everyone has the need to be seen, heard, understood and protected. When you acknowledge your citizens, constituents, patrons, or customers by name and give them respect, they respond accordingly. We all crave the human touch, and personable interactions sweetened by magic words that touch our heart.*

- **Thanking Your Customers.** There are many things to be thankful for. Yet how often do you express your appreciation for your customers? You can thank them for their patronage, their referrals and for their trust placed in you.

*Thanking your customers restores their faith in your organization and its commitment to their satisfaction.*

- **Handing Complaints.** Are you also thankful when customers complain or tell you about ways your organization missed the mark in serving them? You should definitely thank them for bringing your service shortcomings to your attention. Once you know where you fell short, your organization has the opportunity to fix glitches and regain your customers' faith in you. Complaints are indeed a gift. They help you improve your procedures and processes, and strengthen the

bonds of your relationships.

*When we survey unhappy, dissatisfied customers about why they didn't speak up or give management feedback sooner, they often say:*

- *"Nobody asked."*
  - *"Nobody seemed to care."*
  - *"When we previously complained nobody followed up."*
  - *"We weren't confident they could or would fix it."*
- **The Art of the Apology.** A heartfelt apology restores lost confidence and allows you to demonstrate your commitment to the happiness of your customers. Saying "I'm sorry", "We're sorry," or "I apologize" doesn't show you as weak, but is actually a show of strength, demonstrating your resolve to make your customers whole again, salve their wounds, improve your operations and improve efficiency and satisfaction levels.

*When you apologize on behalf of your organization, the healing begins right away. Defensiveness dissolves and resolution is now possible.*

At its core, customer service is about attentiveness, friendliness, listening, and empathy. It's as much about mindset as it is phraseology. The same skills you employed while selling lemonade or Girl Scout cookies as a kid will hold you in good stead as a service professional. Open your heart, put your customers first, greet and leave them with a smile, and you'll strengthen their trust in your organization.



Learn more about our popular training courses related to this article:

[\*\*Exceptional Customer Service: Putting People First in the Public Sector\*\*](#)

## [Ask, Listen and Influence: Develop Skills of Inquiry and Listening](#)

## [Emotional Intelligence: What it is and how to increase yours](#)

## [Managing Conflict with Customers and Co-Workers](#)

Do you have a leader or employee in need coaching to improve their leadership, communication skills, customer service, or emotional intelligence? **[We can help.](#)**



Contact The Consulting Team to learn more about training, coaching, consulting assistance and also one-to-one training for leaders and employees.

Call us at 650-965-3663  
or email us at  
[M@TheConsultingTeam.com](mailto:M@TheConsultingTeam.com)  
for more information.  
[www.TheConsultingTeam.com](http://www.TheConsultingTeam.com)

**The Consulting Team**  
— FACILITATING POSITIVE CHANGE —