

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Raising the Level of Customer Service."

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

I recently heard a salesman's pitch that began with an endless litany of detailed benefits that his company offered. My train of thought went elsewhere the moment that he mentioned the second benefit because they were not benefits that met my needs. Customers are interested only in benefits that meet their needs. This salesman did not know my needs, and he did not know me.

How do you know a customer's needs? The first step is getting to know your customer. Recognize their behavior style. Ask questions. Listen. Build an appropriate relationship. How do you build work relationships based on different behavior styles?

Ask a short series of specific questions to ascertain the needs of the task-oriented extrovert. They will not "spoon-feed" you, so you'll have to do advance research and preparation. They will then want options that are quickly summarized in order of benefit to them. They also want your intense attention, to hear your brief presentation, to hear you ask for the sale, and take little of their time. This will be a relationship based on business with very limited small talk.

People-oriented extroverts want to experience your sense of humor, bask in your attention, and hear the highlights of what you can do for them. You'll have to show your personality, share some stories, and be able to steer them back to business at the right time. Build relationships with these people by sincerely listening to what is important to them and touching base on a regular basis. Expect to spend a little more time than usual, and remember to take care of the details for them. A fun relationship works well with these people.

People-oriented introverts want to get to know you in a series of low-pressure visits that allow them time to build trust. Their decision will be based on their trust in you, your company, and your product or service. Build relationships with these people by taking your time, sharing information about yourself, and being a stable, routine resource for them. Reliable service after the sale is essential. They will thrive on your memory of the conversations you've had with them and your genuine interest in them as a person. A low-key, friendly relationship works best.

Listen to the task-oriented introverts. They will

What Our Clients Are Saying

"We certainly received good reviews of your workshop and hope to use you again in training."

James Crawford, Washington, D.C.



share a lot of information about their business and underlying logistics of need. A lot of it may seem irrelevant to you, but it is very relevant to them. Take notes. They will also favor a logical presentation from you

that includes details and information to keep and read later. Remember not to be too friendly because their decisions are based on an objective evaluation of how effectively you can meet their needs. Attention to detail and making sure that your product or service is correctly implemented will earn their respect.

Avoid the blind, "shotgun" benefits-approach to sales. Build your business by investing in relationships with your customers. Get to know them and what they need before you do anything else. The key to any relationship is an adapted approach, good listening, plus routine contact and good service. Your predictability and genuine interest in other people will define your success in business and in life.

IN THE NEWS: Mentoring Web Cast Still Available



Beverly Inman-Ebel was joined by an outstanding "cast" recently during a nationally broadcast web cast entitled Passing On The Passion.

Sponsored by the National Women's Business Council, this event was broadcast live from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce building in Washington DC, and can still be seen by going to the NWBC web site (www.nwbc.gov) and clicking on the web cast link.

Mentoring – in all its variations – is an especially effective resource to support women in their efforts to achieve the "American Dream" – starting and growing their own business. Mentoring helps at all stages of growth. Mentoring programs can support women as they start up their own ventures, as they grow their firms, and as they achieve success.



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LOOKING AHEAD:

- ♦ The June issue of The Exchange will focus on Success.

LOOKING BACK:

- ♦ For previous editions of The Exchange, go to our [back issues](#).
- ♦ Re-read the [03/2001 edition: Sales](#).

It is not the employer who pays the wages. Employers only handle the money. It is the customer who pays the wages.

Henry Ford



Helpful Hints:

- Under-promise and over-deliver.
- Give your team the authority to satisfy customers.

Businesses planned for service are apt to succeed; businesses planned for profit are apt to fail.

Nicholas Murray Butler

One customer, well taken care of, could be more valuable than \$10,000 worth of advertising.

Jim Rohn



To learn more about it, click here!

CUSTOMER SERVICE

By Don Wheeler

Do you ever feel that as you greet customers coming in the front door others are exiting the back door? Providing a level of customer service that exceeds expectations is one of the best ways to retain customer loyalty. It's tougher than ever to earn customer loyalty. Did you know that once you get a new customer, it's likely to take 18 – 24 months for you to break even on the cost of getting them? It costs a lot more money to get new customers than you'd spend to take better care of the ones you already have.

If you are staying at the Ritz-Carlton and have a question or problem and tell someone at the front desk about it, that person is then responsible for that particular complaint and your satisfaction. He/she will get in touch with the right person to make certain the problem is fixed. The staff will do whatever it takes to satisfy you. They will then follow up with you to ascertain your level of satisfaction. You probably won't get that kind of service from most hotels, but Ritz-Carlton empowers all their associates with the authority to solve all customer complaints/issues. Hotel guests do not have to wait for a manager or supervisor to get something fixed.

Let's say you are shopping at Nordstrom's department store and are buying shoes. You then want a pair of pants or another item from a separate department. The associate that handled your transaction in the shoe department can walk you to any other department and wait on you there. You may not get that kind of attention at most other stores.

What can you do to see if your company is providing that "something extra" that will keep people coming back again and again?

Be willing and able to change! Your customers' needs change every day in response to the world they live in. Don't fall into the trap of saying, "I've always done that this way." Or, "It's always worked for me this way." Take the time to inspect your processes to make sure they are working well for your customers.

Be willing to ask for feedback about your products or services! Your customers are the best source for feedback regarding service and the quality of it. Don't stop there, though. Ask everyone associated with your business open questions such as "What can we do to make your interaction with us more pleasant?" Or, "What can we do to make you happier with our services?"

Provide a forum to share all this feedback, exchange ideas, or to talk about information gathered. Having a meeting where these ideas can be shared freely is a most important step. Let all your associates have a voice. An open meeting works best and creates a welcoming atmosphere for new ideas. Provide this forum on a regular basis, at least monthly. Weekly is even better.

Listen! Listen to your customers, all your

employees, your management team, and your vendors. They will tell you what you need to know if you ask the right questions. Ask questions that begin with "how or "what." For example, "How are we meeting your expectations?"

Draw upon your own experiences with customer service issues to help guide you. Like The Ritz-Carlton and Nordstrom's, what can you and your organization do that allows you to stand above your competitors?



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: Hiwassee River Rail Adventure

Enjoy a wonderful 25-mile, 2-hour roundtrip rail excursion alongside the Hiwassee Scenic River to the TVA Apalachia powerhouse. This is the first passenger excursion on the "Old Line" of the former Louisville & Nashville Railroad in over 10 years.

These unique trips will run for 3 consecutive weekends in May. Shuttle busses depart the L & N Depot Museum in Downtown Etowah, Tennessee, on the following dates:

- 15th & 16th
- 22nd & 23rd
- 29th & 30th

Seating will be on a fully restored coach and by reservation only. The cost is \$29.00 per person.

To coincide with this event, we are offering a 10% discount for stays at our Spring Creek Retreat property during the month of May. Contact information -

River Rail Ticket Line: 423-894-8028

Spring Creek Retreat reservation office: 1-800-488-7218, or www.springcreekretreat.com.

FEATURED SERVICE: Spring Creek Retreat

Spring has arrived and the Cherokee National Forest is alive with wildflowers and budding trees. Call Spring Creek Retreat to reserve your mountain home for a weekend or week. Also plan now to take your work family away so that they can come together. For pricing and reservations call 1-800-488-7218 or take a virtual tour at www.springcreekretreat.com.

ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET

Because the market is so competitive, prices and services are being compared in all areas.

The best way to beat the competition is to out-service them in the customer service department by rolling out the red carpet.

The expressions, "rolling out the red carpet," and, "giving the royal treatment," refer to making customers feel special. Let's further examine where this saying originated.

Centuries ago, it was customary to put down carpet (actually, any fabric or covering) over the ground to allow dignitaries to walk on something other than the same ground that everyone else walked on. The color red was chosen because it was flashy and eye-catching. Even today, at ceremonies, awards banquets, and other special events, we acknowledge those who are special by "rolling out the red carpet" and giving them the "royal treatment."

To raise our levels of customer service, let's apply this practice to the most important people we have, **our customers**. Every customer deserves the "red carpet" and "royal treatment," and as a customer, you deserve it too!



ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

This letter is in response to your "Eyeing the Meeting" article.

With the onslaught of electronic gadgets, I feel like I am in grade school with notes being passed back and forth to my friends. With all the beeping and buzzing of Blackberries, Palms, and telephones, it is often difficult to hold a meeting and keep people tuned in to the discussion. Not only does it distract the employee with the Blackberry, but the people around them and the speaker. It's so easy to receive the message and it's even easier to respond. So there is more likelihood that the person will stop, read the incoming message, and immediately respond back, which often initiates a flurry of email traffic.

What ever happened to a piece of paper and pencil at a meeting to take notes?

A Communications Specialist

Dear Specialist,

We, at TLC, share your concern. We recommend that participants establish guidelines before the start of each meeting to determine acceptable behavior.

DEALING WITH THE CEO IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

American customers are accustomed to a rapid paced solution to their needs. In our automated world, having to wait can cause frustration. When customers deal with company representatives instead of machines, the need for speed continues. For this reason, customers expect ownership from the person they are talking to. This "C.E.O." attitude can lead to tremendous dissatisfaction when it is not delivered.

Have you ever written a check to a store where the cashier is not authorized to accept a check for greater than a certain amount? Waiting for a manager to come and place his or her initials on the check is indeed poor customer service. The store would do well to hire people who are capable of handling checks that have more than two zeroes.

Just what is ownership? It is the authority given to anyone who represents the company to make customers happy. Everyone that works for the company is a customer service representative. It is not a job title, rather, it is a job responsibility.

Longhorn Steak House empowers their people that serve their customers. On a recent visit of four people, three of the steaks were over-cooked. The waiter did not charge for those meals and promptly replaced them. The manager followed the guests out to their car to give them gift cards for three free steaks. Will those guests return? You bet!

Whether your business is retail, wholesale, professional service, or manufacturing, realize that your customers expect ownership from anyone that they come into contact with. When each employee becomes a CEO, everyone wins!

IS THE CUSTOMER ALWAYS RIGHT?

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

A woman complains that her hot chocolate is "too hot." A man refuses to pay his bill at "Larry's Hamburger Palace" because he says that his spaghetti tastes like a frozen entrée. A couple wants the car dealership to pay for damages to their car claiming, "The oil light has been on for weeks but it only started blinking a few days ago."

For as long as I can remember, I have heard the expression, "The customer is always right." Always right? Wow, if that's true, what about the previous examples, or perhaps the several personal examples you've experienced? When it comes to customer service, doing what's right

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Remember to...

- Ask open questions to uncover customer expectations, and then give more.
- Get a report card. Ask your customers how you are doing.

Well done is better than well said.

Benjamin Franklin

Quality in a service or product is not what you put into it. It is what the client or customer gets out of it.

Peter Drucker

Here is a simple but powerful rule - always give people more than what they expect to get.

Nelson Boswell



TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

There are no traffic jams along the extra mile.

Roger Staubach

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CEO CORNER: "Expectations"

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

For spring break this year, my family took a trip to Prague in the Czech Republic and to Krakow, Poland. Because these countries are still emerging from four decades of communist rule, and we were not visiting them in their prime tourist season, I had very few expectations.

Since I personally made the travel arrangements months in advance, I did expect to arrive with my family. Business takes me away from them and I had planned special snacks, card games, and long awaited conversations as we flew up the eastern coast and over the Atlantic. My first surprise came from my (previous) airline of choice giving my seat away and not allowing me to board with my family. In my vacation and carefree attitude, I handled it fairly well until I questioned the ticket agent at the gate and heard, "I told you to sit down and wait until I got you a ticket!" This sole instance of poor customer service caused me to book my next business flight with another carrier. On the trip home, Air France provided a private escort to get my family to our next gate in Paris because the flights were booked only forty minutes apart. I will look for an opportunity to fly with them again.

Getting off the tourist beat, I entered a sporting goods store in Prague looking for a back support to help my aching spine handle all the cobblestones. I asked the store clerk if she spoke English. The woman, responding in her native language, violently shook her head, threw her hands up in the air and turned her back to me. Later, I entered a pharmacy seeking the same remedy, and while this woman did not speak English either, she humored me by following my pantomimes and gestures. While I did not purchase her pills or offered bandages, I left feeling that she did everything she could to try and help me.

In Krakow, the hotel staff recommended that they book a large taxi for us the night before our departure. That was appreciated customer service. They forgot to mention that Europe changed to Daylight Savings Time that next morning (a week before the United States), so we were late for the taxi and missed our train. The taxi driver was very patient and waited over thirty minutes until we could be located. We tipped him well for his extra service that was provided with a smile.

I returned from this very educational trip with a new appreciation for customer service. Who is our customer? Anyone we come into contact with while we represent our companies, organizations, or culture. Poor service from one person can end a long relationship. Don't let that person be

you. Expect to give more than you are asked. And speaking of expectations, the next vacation I take, I will expect superior customer service. My reason? I think we tend to get what we expect to get. Expect. Receive. Live your dreams.



Is the Customer Always Right, continued from page 3

and doing right by the customer can be different things. So how do you handle a situation when the customer is wrong?

1. Talk low & slow. When people get emotional, they talk louder and faster. Instead of yelling back, use a soft, slow, neutral tone with them. Even if they continuously yell or speak quickly, maintain your low-key demeanor, and after 3 or 4 conversational exchanges, they will begin to calm down.

2. Calm the Storm. Strong emotions in a customer can be like a brewing storm. Words such as, "wrong," "no," etc., can cause their anger to escalate. Use dates, times, and numbers, instead of ambiguous words like "soon," "expensive," "right," or "wrong." Instead of saying, "You're too late to do anything about this now. Sorry," say, "Your warranty is good for 30 days after your purchase. According to the receipt, it has been 52 days."

3. Go Up to Help Them Up. By asking questions that begin with "how" or "what," find out what the customer wants. If you do not have the authority to accommodate their request, consult with a manager or supervisor. Tell the customer you want to help them, and you are going to upper management. At this point, regardless of the outcome, the customer feels they have an ally in you and that you are taking them seriously.

4. Let the company's terms and conditions be your scapegoat to remove yourself from the situation. If you have made an error and the customer is free of any wrongdoing, not only fix it, give them something extra. If the customer is wrong, let them know the limitations of what you can do.

There will be times a challenging customer will test your ethics and your patience. Every situation is different because each customer is unique. Remember that no matter how the situation is resolved, that customer will tell someone else about how they were treated. Although the statement, "the customer is always right," can be argued, we can agree that whether right or wrong, the customer is always the customer.

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