

ALESSANDRA
ON...

CUSTOMER DRIVEN SERVICE

How To Get — And Keep — Customers

WORKBOOK

Customer-Driven Service

*You Are The Service Advantage for
Getting and Keeping Customers*

Dr. Tony Alessandra
Alessandra & Associates
P.O. Box 2767
La Jolla, CA 92038
(619) 459-4515
(800) 222-4383
(619) 459-0435 FAX
Dr Tony A @ aol.com
www.alessandra.com

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La Jolla, California
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This workbook was written with the assistance of Robert Coates of Success Sciences, Inc. Success Sciences is an international training and consulting firm with an outstanding track record for helping clients create breakthroughs in customer service. Dr. Alessandra and Success Sciences often team up to work with clients. Many organizations use Dr. Alessandra as the dynamic keynote speaker on customer service and Success Sciences as the follow-up with in-depth training programs and workshops.

The concepts of Commitment, Effective Communication, and Conflict Resolution, which are the foundation of this workbook, were adapted from the three essentials of effective relationships by my friend and frequent co-author, Jim Cathcart, of La Jolla, California.

For more information about the keynote speeches of Dr. Tony Alessandra or the customized training programs available through Success Sciences, including train-the-trainer formats, call Holli Catchpole at (800) 222-4383.

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CUSTOMER-DRIVEN SERVICE – An Introduction

Welcome to “Customer-Driven Service.”

So, what can you expect to gain from this workbook? Tools. Tools to help you be more successful with your customers.

You have a toolbox of skills for working with customers now. Through this workbook we invite you to open-up that toolbox. You may discover an old tool--one you haven't used in a while and decide to take it out, polish it up and start using it again. Or, maybe you will discover a new use for an old tool. One you had, but never thought of using with customers. Or, perhaps you'll discover a totally new tool, one you never even knew existed. Explore all the tools as you go. Don't decide right away whether a particular tool is for you or not. Keep your toolbox open. Try them all out during the program. At the end, you will have a chance to decide which tools you want to carry away.

Delivering quality service should be of concern to *anyone* in business who is in contact with anyone else. Service cuts across all functions of an organization – sales, management, front line personnel such as secretaries, receptionists and telephone operators, and, obviously, customer service departments. Consequently, this workbook is essential for:

- Service Professionals
- Sales Professionals
- Managers concerned with using service as a competitive advantage
- Employees at any level within a business who wish to improve their level of service

The word “customer,” used throughout this workbook, creates an immediate image of a buyer of services or products. But it is important to note that a “customer” isn't necessarily just on the “outside.”

Consider those who work in a company's personnel office. Their contacts are certainly with the outside, but they also serve “customers” inside the company – managers who request replacements or applicants for new positions, employees who may require training, etc. Consequently, as you read through this workbook and complete the exercises, keep in mind that some of the references will obviously better fit the external context of “customer,” but many of the references can be applied (and should be) to the internal customer as well.

Personal Goals

You learn much more effectively when you are focused. Write out specific personal learning goals you have for this program.

What do you want to learn? How will it impact your service?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

OPERATIONS-DRIVEN VERSUS CUSTOMER-DRIVEN SERVICE

As a customer in today's market place, what impresses you the most? What prompts you to more often return to a particular store rather than "shop around?" You, like most others in both their business and private lives, are no longer always shopping for the lowest cost—you are looking for what gives you the greatest *value*. When you find that value, you return again and again and again. What is it that gives a retail store or other business a greater value over its competitors? It's their *customer-driven* orientation.

A business can be classified as either *customer-driven* or *operations-driven*. It either attempts to serve primarily the customer, thus being *customer-driven*, or it primarily serves itself, thus being *operations-driven*.

Think back on some of your recent experiences as a customer with various businesses. As you read through the following brief descriptions, see if you can label each of those companies as either operations-driven or customer-driven:

The operations-driven business tends to be *internally* focused, always looking inside their business for ways to make things easier for the employees. This type of business creates systems and procedures to protect themselves from the outside world. The customer-driven business, on the other hand, is *externally* focused, always looking for ways to make things easier for its customers. Such a business creates policies and procedures that are advantageous or friendly to its customers.

The operations-driven mentality is "How can we *sell* something?" and thus uses a product/feature focus. The customer-driven mentality, on the other hand, is "How can we *help* people?" using instead a customer/benefit focus.

Operations-driven employees seem to say, "If it weren't for all of these customers, we could get our job done!" In contrast, the customer-driven employees seem to say, "If it weren't for our customers, we wouldn't have a job!"

Operations-driven companies have their eye solely on the bottom line, while customer-driven companies keep an eye on the customer.

Years ago, before the "information age," companies truly differentiated themselves with their products. For example, think about how different cars looked back in the 50's compared with those of today. In today's business environment, however, technology is duplicated so quickly that most products are very much alike, regardless of the brand. Such similarity reduces most products to a commodity status. Consequently, the only real way for a business to set itself and its product above and apart from its competitors is through *customer-driven* orientation.

In an economic downturn, it is the customer-driven business that survives. Why? Because it looks at how it can create a competitive advantage and uniqueness so that people will want to do business with them. It knows that people will be willing to pay more for goods or services if they are getting more value. In contrast, the operations-driven business focuses on what costs can be cut. As the company slashes and cuts, service declines. The market then responds with less business. As business goes down, so do the revenues.

Understanding these basic differences between an operations-driven and a customer-driven business is essential if a positive change toward customer-driven service is to be made. The chart on the following page gives you a summary of these basic differences:

**THE OPERATIONS-DRIVEN BUSINESS
VS.
THE CUSTOMER-DRIVEN BUSINESS**

OPERATIONS-DRIVEN BUSINESS		CUSTOMER-DRIVEN BUSINESS
- Serves the business	ORIENTATION	- Serves the customer
INTERNAL - Consistently looks for ways to make things easier for its <i>employees</i> . - Creates systems and procedures to protect itself.	FOCUS	EXTERNAL - Consistently looks for ways to make things easier for its <i>customers</i> . - Sets policies and procedures that are advantageous/friendly to its customers.
PRODUCT/FEATURE	SALES FOCUS	CUSTOMER/BENEFIT
"How can we sell something?"	MENTALITY	"How can we help people?"
"If it weren't for all of these customers, we could get our job done!"	ATTITUDE	"If it weren't for our customers, we wouldn't have a job!"
CUT BACK - Focuses on how to cut costs.	REACTION TO AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN	ENHANCE - Attempts to create an even greater competitive advantage and uniqueness.

2

WHAT IS THE SERVICE ADVANTAGE?

Just what is the Service Advantage? Let's examine that question from two perspectives. First the advantage to your organization of having service that customers find distinctive. And second just what it is that creates outstanding service in the customer's mind.

In the last ten years, a number of organizations have studied customer behavior and quality service. Their findings show the importance of customer service in winning and keeping customers. Let's take a look at some of the research

According to John Franco, former president of Xerox Learning Systems, eight of the top ten reasons customers give for buying a specific product or service have to do with the delivery of customer service. Things like responsiveness, technical knowledge or skill, and professional attitude.

British Airways' found that friendly staff was twice as important as operational factors, like food service and speed of check-in, for generating goodwill with their customers.

The Strategic Planning Institute found that companies considered to be service leaders can charge 10% more for their products or service than average companies. They also tend to grow twice as fast and are 10 times more profitable than companies at the bottom of the service ranking.

And when 600 senior executives were asked what would be the most critical factor in the success of their business the top answer was service quality.

Poor service also has an effect. A Forum Corporation study found that 7 out of 10 customers said they left a business because of poor service not price or quality.

And when the Small Business Administration asked sales people why customers stopped buying. Their response was because prices were too high. Yet, when the customers were asked "why did you stop doing business with a particular company?," only 9% even mentioned price. 68% said it was because of indifferent treatment by an employee.

Obviously, there is an advantage to having a distinctive level of quality service. Yet, more than 50% of customers rank the service they receive as "only fair" or "poor."

Just what is quality service to the customer? What makes it distinctive ? When it comes to defining quality service the only perception that really counts is the customer's, because it's the only one that will determine their decisions —their decision on whether to continue to do business with you or not.

To discover how customers define quality service—let's use your own experiences as customers. All of us have been customers somewhere and experienced good service and poor service. Let's use those experiences to begin defining quality service.

Let's start by examining situations where you as the customer have experienced quality service. Think of an experience where you were the customer and someplace you did business created a positive impression on you. They created a service advantage in how they treated you.

Personal Positive Customer Experience

Think of a specific time where you *as the customer* experienced quality service. Pick a situation where the service you received made you feel you definitely wanted to do business there again. In the space below briefly describe what the service person did or said to create this positive impression on you.

Common Elements of Quality Service

If you share your personal experiences as customers, you'll probably find you all had different kinds of situations and service examples. So, what's the common element that holds all of these different experiences together? In every case, the customer had his or her expectations met or maybe even exceeded. Statements like "She did more than I expected," or "He went out of his way," or even "she went the extra mile." often are heard in these discussions.

So a useful way of defining **quality service is meeting or exceeding the customer's expectations**. After all isn't that how you define it as a customer? When you get treated the way you think you should be or better? When your expectations are met? Therefore let's define quality service as meeting or exceeding the customer's expectations.

In thinking about customer expectations, it's important to consider the entire customer encounter. Every service encounter is made up of two levels -- the Performance level and the Personal level. Both are important to quality service. The Performance level is the bottom line. It's why the customer is interacting with you. Your prices, your policies, the quality of your products or services and the tasks you perform are some of the things that make up the Performance level.

The Personal level is how we get treated as a customer, as a person, while we're doing business.

Take a restaurant. Why do you go there? For food, of course. So the Performance level is the food -- is it hot, if it's suppose to be hot; is it cold, if it's suppose to be cold; does it taste right; is it a reasonable amount for the cost. And do you get it in a reasonable time after you order.

The Personal level is how you get treated by the servers while getting your food. Do they smile? Are they attentive to you needs? Do they listen and check back?

Both levels--Personal and Performance--are part of every interaction. When you ask for more coffee does the waiter roll his eyes and sigh? Or bring it with a smile? Either way you get your coffee--the Performance level, but what perception of service do you have?

It really takes both levels to create service excellence. To create a service advantage we must attend to both the Performance and the Personal level with customers. However, do they contribute equally in creating distinctive service? How much of what makes a positive customer experience--one that stands out, is the Performance level? And how much of what makes service stand out is Personal level?

Think back to your own personal service experience. How much of what made that experience stand out in your mind as quality service was the Performance level—the price, the policies, the features of the product or service, the tasks the person performed? And how much of what made the experience stand out was the Personal level—the way they treated you as a customer while taking care of your Performance level needs? What percentage would you give to each level, in terms of what made it a positive service experience for you?

The Personal and Performance Level

Personal level % of positive experiences _____

Performance level % of positive experiences _____

For most people the average has been 25% Performance and 75% Personal. How we get treated as a person—a valued customer—has the greatest impact on our perception of service.

Does this mean that the Performance level is not that important to customers? No.. Think about it. When some organization does the Performance level well, what is our reaction as customers? — (*Shrug*) “Well, yeah that’s what I paid you for.” Let’s take a personal example. When you got up this morning, groped your way to the bathroom to go through your morning ritual to get ready for your day. When you reached out, flipped the switch and the light came on did you say, “Yes, power company you did it again!” No. Why? You expect the light to go on when you flip the switch. You expect the power company to **Perform**. It’s only when it doesn’t that you even notice.

The majority of what makes service stand out in the customer’s mind is the Personal level—the way we get treated as a customer, while doing business.

Another thing to consider is the amount of control or influence you have at each level. How much control do you have over Performance level items like - prices, policies, procedures, and the environment? Usually, not much. Now you do have control over the tasks you perform—ringing up the sale, providing accurate information, returning phone calls, etc.

How much control do you have over the Personal level--how you treat the customer? 100% of this level is under your control. The part with the largest impact on customers’ perceptions of quality of service, is under your control. See **you** really are **the service advantage**. The way you interact with your customers has a tremendous impact on their satisfaction and whether they become loyal customers or not.

Quality service is meeting or exceeding the customer’s expectations. Often people think exceeding the customer’s expectations means “going the extra mile.” But, go back and think about the experiences your group shared. Did the people who created those experiences really go **a mile** out of there way? Usually the answer is No. They didn’t go a **mile**. They just did a little bit more than you expected or have gotten use to. They went the extra **inch**. The value-added inch. The inch that can make a big difference.

To create the Service Advantage takes doing just a little bit more than your competition. Little things make a big difference.

What can you do to add that “extra inch” of service with your customers?

3

WHAT DO CUSTOMERS EXPECT?

Having defined quality service as meeting or exceeding customer expectations, the next question we need to explore is just what do customers expect? At the Performance level that would be difficult to answer since it would vary widely depending on your particular industry and the specifics of the customer situation.

At the Personal level though there are some pretty consistent customer expectations. There's a lot of talk in today's schools about getting back to the basics--the 3-R's -Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. Well, in customer service it helps to keep the basics in mind as well. The 3'R's of Customer Expectations--Respect, Responsiveness and Responsibility. Let's examine each R individually and see what you can do to meet or exceed your customer's expectations.

Respect for the customer is the foundation for meeting customer expectations at the Personal level. Everything else you do to effectively meet the customer's needs and expectations builds on this foundation. Just what is respect? It's demonstrating to the customer that they are the most important person in the world at this moment. It begins with an attitude that says "You are important and I'm here to serve you."

L.L. Bean has a poster titled "What Is A Customer" that captures this attitude of respect.

A Customer is the most important person ever in this office...in person, by mail, or by phone.
A Customer is not dependent on us. . . we are dependent on him.
A Customer is not an interruption of our work. . . he is the purpose of it. We are not doing a favor by serving him. . . he is doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so.
A Customer is not someone to argue or match wits with. Nobody ever won an argument with a Customer.
A Customer is a person who brings us his wants. It is our job to handle them profitably for him and for ourselves.

This poster is displayed throughout all areas of L.L. Bean to help keep people focused on the importance of the customer. To reinforce that attitude of Respect.

That attitude should set the tone for every part of your interaction with the customer. But there are certain specifics we need to pay attention to that convey respect to the customer. First are the simple courtesies. A pleasant greeting, an offer to help, the use of the customers name (if appropriate) and saying please and thank-you are all demonstrations of respect.

Next is giving the customer your full attention. Stop whatever else you are doing and focus on the customer. It's also important to listen fully to the customer and make sure they feel heard and understood. Listening without interrupting to make sure we understand their needs and expectations. And even appearance if you serve customers face-to-face. Does your appearance and that of your work area show respect for yourself, your business and your customer?

While respect begins with an attitude it gets expressed through consistent action. What are the things you need to do to meet your customers' expectation of Respect?

The second R of customer expectations is Responsiveness. In today's fast paced world and rapidly changing marketplace, the service advantage goes to those who can quickly respond to customer's unique needs. On the Performance level, this means having systems and processes which allow for rapid development and delivery of products and services.

On the Personal level, it means treating each customer's situation as unique. Unlike a product which can be developed, produced and stored until a customer calls for it -- each customer getting the same, service must be produced moment to moment with the individual customer.

Do you believe you are just the like every other person in the world? No, of course not. We are all unique individuals. And as customers, we see our situation or needs as unique.

The expectations around timeliness are becoming increasingly demanding. There was a time when the mail was an acceptable way to send written information or material to a customer. Then Federal Express convinced us that it "absolutely positively had to be there overnight." And now we can't even wait until tomorrow. Information has to be faxed now!

In serving customers, there are several aspects to Responsiveness we need to pay attention to. The first is being ready to help. This means having the knowledge and tools we need to assist the customer. Being prepared, organized and making sure we have the materials at hand to respond to customer needs.

Next is timeliness. This ranges from answering the phone promptly or acknowledging a customer right away to expediting actions or information. Remember, customers tend to be a very impatient lot.

Responsiveness also means demonstrating your willingness to help. Communicating to the customer your desire to serve. From the simple "How may I help you?" to, in a problem situation, stating your commitment to resolving the situation to the customer's satisfaction.

Prompt action is another key to meeting customer expectations. Whether or not you can immediately take care of all a customers needs, it is crucial that you show some immediate response.

Remaining flexible to meeting the needs and expectations of a wide range of customers is a constant challenge. After doing a job for awhile it is easy to see things as routine and handle them in an almost mechanical way. Staying open and adaptable is crucial for creating distinctive service. Banks have found that customers love ATM's or automated teller machines for getting cash or checking balances. But only a small percentage of their customers will make deposits or payments through them. Why? Because, if there is a problem a machine has no flexibility or adaptability. Only a person can do that.

And finally, Responsiveness means Accessibility. Being available to the customer when they need you. This runs the continuum from answering your phone or being visible to the customer to returning phone calls or voice-mail. Make it easy for your customers to communicate their needs to you.

To create a service advantage, you need to meet or exceed the customer's expectations for responsiveness. What are the specific expectations your customers have in this area? And what can you do to meet or exceed them?

The final of our 3-R's is Responsibility. Customers want to deal with someone who will take ownership for helping them and getting their needs met. Little is as frustrating to a customer as having a service provider throw-up their hands as if nothing can be done. By taking responsibility for the customer and their satisfaction, we create a proactive, professional image.

Being responsible starts with a can-do, take charge attitude. You may not always be the person who can help the customer fully, however you can take responsibility for making sure the customer gets the help they need. The more people a customer has to deal with to get their needs met, the less satisfied they will be with the service. You want to make it easy for them to get what they need.

You work for your customers. It's your job to represent the customers and their needs to the organization, because you know the procedures, the organization, the products and services. Customers don't want to or need to figure those out. They just want what they want. That sums up the essence of Responsibility.

Meeting the customer's expectations for Responsibility consists of several things. First and foremost is "Own the Customer." If you can take care of the customer's needs, do so. If you're not the person who can take care of their needs, you own them until you get them to the person who can.

Next is "Know Your Job and Your Organization." Knowing your job allows you to respond immediately to customer needs. Avoiding the delays that can happen when you need to ask someone else or look-up information. Take the time to learn about your products and services, policies and procedures. Also, go beyond just your job and take responsibility for learning about your organization. Having the big picture will allow you to better understand what's possible in taking care of a customer. It also will allow you to make sure you can get the customer to the person who can help them, if you're not able to.

Another key is "Make It Easy for the Customer." Many times as customers, businesses place the burden on us to figure out how to do business with them. Where do we go? Who do we call? Which form is needed? What information is required? and on and on. You create a distinct service advantage when you make it easy for the customer to do business with you. Look for ways to take on the burden yourself and away from the customer.

Be Proactive. Look for ways to identify and anticipate the customer's needs. Think about what you would want if you were the customer in this situation, and then find away to provide it.

And finally, Recover. When there is a problem, or a mistake has been made, take responsibility for it. First, apologize and own it. You may not have made the mistake or created the problem, but you can still apologize on behalf of your organization. Then take whatever steps you can to fix it. Many people make the mistake of placing blame for problems on the customer. This will never create a perception of quality service. Customers aren't always right, but they ARE always the Customer. Just like the boss may not always be right, but the boss is always the boss. If the customer has a problem, we have a problem. So take responsibility and do what you can to fix it.

You create a service advantage by delivering quality service. And you've seen from your own experiences that quality service is meeting or exceeding the customer's expectations. At the Personal level keep in mind the 3-R's -- Respect, Responsiveness, and Responsibility.

3-R's OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Respect

Showing our Respect for the customer and their needs is the foundation of quality service. Respect is demonstrated by many small things. What can you do to communicate Respect with your customers? Be specific. What will you **do** or **say**?

Responsiveness

To every customer their situation is unique and the most urgent. What are the specific things you can do to demonstrate your Responsiveness?

Responsibility

Nothing frustrates a customer more than feeling they are getting shuffled around or no one is “owning” their problem or needs. What can you do to demonstrate taking Responsibility for a customer and their needs?

4

IS YOUR SERVICE CUSTOMER-DRIVEN?

Service that is really *customer-driven* is built upon a foundation of three key areas, each of which must be practiced consistently to achieve strong customer relations:

1. *COMMITMENT*

There must be commitment to customer-driven service that permeates *all* levels of a company including the C.E.O., every manager, all salespeople, receptionists, secretaries, phone operators, and custodians. A company may say it has a customer-driven philosophy, but if every single person does not put it into practice, then it is *not* a customer-driven company.

2. *EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION*

There must be effective communication that builds solid relationships built on trust. Keeping in touch appropriately, listening actively, and asking purposeful questions must be practiced consistently if communication on all levels is to be effective.

3. *A CONFLICT RESOLUTION SYSTEM*

And finally, a sound conflict resolution process must be in place that is well understood and can be put into immediate action when necessary to ensure that problems are resolved quickly, efficiently, and to the satisfaction of the customer.

Your job is to create as much *value* as possible for your customers. Do you know what value you create for your customers? Do you know what level of service you are providing—and the level of service your company as a whole is providing for its customers?

Take a few minutes now to respond to the following questions under each of the three key areas of strong customer relations. Your *written* responses will help you determine to what degree your business is customer-driven.

COMMITMENT

1. What is your function in your company? (What is the purpose of your job?)_____
2. What do you do to maintain a high degree of professionalism? _____

3. In what industry-related activities do you participate? _____

4. Do you have a checklist of things to be done when you receive an order to ensure that product delivery/installation or service commencement is done correctly? _____

If you do, what's on that checklist to ensure that things are done right the first time?

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

5. What is your current method for collecting and communicating information to your customers? _____

a. Is your method organized? _____ b. Is it done on a regular basis? _____

6. Do you *regularly* check with your customers to uncover new needs or problems? _____
If "yes," define what you mean by "regular". _____

7. When you uncover problems with your products or services, do you feed back that information to the right people in your company? _____
If "yes," what results frequently come from your feedback?

8. Do you engage in joint planning and implementation with your customers? _____
If "yes," what form does it take? _____

What is the usual response from your customers? _____

A CONFLICT RESOLUTION SYSTEM

9. How do you react to customers' complaints? _____

10. Outline below how you would handle the most common complaint from a customer, should a customer call you at this moment with that complaint:

5

COMMITMENT

What should the *function* of a customer-driven business be? “To make money—that’s obvious!”

Ironically, although “making money” may be the obvious answer, it isn’t the correct one. Making money is the *goal* of business, not its function. The *function* of a customer-driven business should be, as Ted Levitt of the Harvard Business School says, “to acquire and maintain customers.” And “to acquire and maintain customers” successfully requires the first key to strong customer relations—*COMMITMENT*.

COMMITMENT to customer-driven service must permeate all levels of your company—from the C.E.O. all the way through to every front-line employee—including all salespeople, receptionists, secretaries, phone operators, and custodians. A company may say it has a customer-driven philosophy, but does every single person in the organization know it *and* put it into practice? If not, then it’s not a customer-driven company.

Consider your own company. Is there a commitment to do *whatever it takes* to make the customer happy? Are new employees quickly and thoroughly oriented to the customer-driven philosophy? Does every employee understand your company’s customer-driven philosophy and *know how to implement it on a day-to-day basis*?

Can every employee in your company explain what their job *really* is? Often employees believe their job is strictly typing or filing or marketing . . . ; consequently, when they get a call from a customer with an unusual request or a problem, they view it as an interruption of their “job.” If, however, every employee in your company knows that their primary function is to get and keep customers, and that every other task in their job description must take second priority, then your business is truly customer-driven.

A company that wants to be truly customer-driven must put everything—its time, money, efforts, words, meetings, slogans, training sessions, and behaviors—behind its commitment to getting and keeping customers. This means that every company employee must do what it takes to accomplish that primary function.

Such commitment isn’t something that *just you* as one employee should feel strongly about, nor is it something that just you should convey to only key staff. Everyone, no matter what their daily tasks involve, must be completely committed to superior customer service. And for every employee to be committed to such superior customer service, *they must know what such customer service is, they must know what it looks like, and they must know what to do to provide it.*

How does a company encourage employees to provide superior customer service? Such a company:

1. **Conveys** to its employees what they can do to provide superior customer service;
2. **Trains** its employees in what they are expected to do;
3. **Measures** the employees' results regularly;
4. **Rewards** employees for creating consistent Moments of Magic with *all* the company's customers, whether they are external or internal customers.

CREATING DEMANDING CUSTOMERS

Every interaction you have with a customer can be described as a Moment of Truth. When an interaction falls short of a customer's expectations, a level of customer dissatisfaction—a Moment of Misery—is created. When an interaction exceeds a customer's expectations, that's a Moment of Magic. Your challenge is to make Moments of Magic out of as many of your interactions with your customers as possible. If you want to build a base of exceptionally satisfied customers who will go out and speak positively about you and your company, and who will literally urge other people to do business with you, you must create consistent Moments of Magic. When you do, you create demanding customers—those customers whom you have treated so well with your superior service, that they are now spoiled—you have raised their level of expectations.

Why create demanding customers? Doesn't that mean more headaches for you? Think about it for a moment. If your customers know that you will take care of them—spoil them—then they are a lot less likely to go looking elsewhere to do business. This creates severe headaches for *your competition*, not you, because the competition generally cannot keep up with the high service standards you have set and that your customers have become accustomed to receiving. Whenever one of your “demanding” customers comes in contact with your competitors, they pale by comparison to your company. There are many examples of companies that deliver consistent Moments of Magic for their customers—Nordstrom's, a retail store, is legendary.

Customer-driven companies attempt to create Moments of Magic with every interaction they have with every customer.

1. They set up systems and procedures to ensure that their customers do not experience problems but in fact experience Moments of Magic with each and every encounter with their business.
2. They develop quality products and services with strong guarantees.
3. They hire dedicated employees, train them well, measure their performance, and reward them when they consistently provide superior customer service.
4. They design customer friendly systems.

In other words, customer-driven companies try to do things right the first time, every time.

But even such customer-driven companies stumble once in a while and create a Moment of Misery—complaints come up, problems happen. The difference between a customer-driven company and an operations-driven company or a well managed customer-driven company and a poorly managed customer-driven company is *how* those problems are handled. The best companies rise above the rest of the crowd by exerting the extra effort to quickly turn a Moment of Misery into a Moment of Magic.

Recovery is the process of turning a Moment of Misery into a Moment of Magic. Sometimes all it takes is something minor—sometimes it takes something major. But when you can turn a Moment of Misery into a Moment of Magic, you take a giant leap ahead in terms of customer satisfaction. Statistics on customer service show that if you can turn a Moment of Misery into a Moment of Magic, you create more customer satisfaction than if nothing went wrong at all!

WHAT ARE YOUR SERVICE STANDARDS?

Now that you have a better idea of what customer-driven service is all about, take a few moments to define your own service standards below. Use this opportunity to brainstorm for ways to improve your service and your company's level of service.

1. Have you defined a level of service that you strive to deliver? _____

If yes, use the questions below to evaluate that level of service that you have defined. If you have not, define your current standards for the following:

- (a) How quickly will you return phone calls? _____
- (b) How closely will you monitor the delivery of products or services to ensure they are delivered in a timely manner?

- (c) Describe the schedule you will follow to keep in touch with your customers:

- (d) How frequently will you solicit customer feedback on your products and service quality?

2. List three ways to make it easier for customers to do business with your company:

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____

3. What is your current process for solving your customers' problems?

List three ways to streamline that problem-solving process:

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

4. What are some recurring problems that your customers experience with your products, services, or your company?

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

List three ways to reduce or eliminate these recurring problems:

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

5. List some opportunities that are presented by the recurring problems that you listed in question 4:

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

6. What are some things that you can do to turn unhappy customers into satisfied, loyal customers?

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

6

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

You *are* committed—you have climbed the first step toward building strong customer relations. But now, how do you put your commitment into practice? How do you accomplish your primary function in business—“acquiring and maintaining customers”?

While commitment is the first essential key to building strong customer relations, you must be able to *effectively communicate* your commitment. *EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION*, then, is the second key to strong customer relations.

Effective communication builds relationships. It can create Moments of Magic, and, perhaps more important, it can help you turn stressful Moments of Misery into Moment of Magic. To effectively communicate with your customers, you must:

1. Keep in touch appropriately.
2. Listen actively.

1. Keep in touch appropriately.

Enhancing customer relationships is a matter of communicating appropriately—keeping in touch as often as the complexity of your product or service requires it. Keeping in touch doesn’t simply mean a quick, “Hi, how are you?” It includes taking the time to listen to your customers’ needs, providing them with evidence of your interest, and making sure they have everything they need to meet their success criteria for your product or service. Not only can frequent communication assure them of your interest, but it can give you early warnings of brewing difficulties that you can more easily handle in the early on. You can keep abreast of management changes, changes in sales volume, initial minor dissatisfaction or difficulty with a product or service, and changes in customer behavior.

There are several methods of keeping in touch regularly with your customers:

A. Follow a Follow-Up Schedule.

Once a sale of a product or service has been made, use the 1-5-15-30 Follow-Up Schedule, developed by my colleague and friend, Rick Barrera, of La Jolla, California, or some similar schedule that adjusts for varying product/service implementation schedules:

- Day 1: Write a short, handwritten thank-you note immediately after the sale.
- Day 5: Approximately 5 days after expected delivery, give your customer a quick call to make sure that everything is OK.
- Day 15: Approximately 15 days after expected delivery, call again. This call lets the customer know that you're still there and want to assure their satisfaction.
- Day 30: Approximately 30 days after the sale, send a gift—a little something extra—to your customer. The gift doesn't have to be expensive, but it should have a high perceived value and be related to their purchase.

B. Conduct an Annual Review for each customer.

The Annual Review is a key way to enhance your relationship with your customers. Much can happen in a year—new needs develop, people move and change jobs. The Annual Review gives you an excellent opportunity to catch up with them and make sure your products or services are still meeting their needs. You'll also find that your customers will ask for your help in areas not previously discussed.

To conduct an Annual Review:

- (1) *Plan* your meeting—planning is essential.
- (2) Arrange for the meeting to take place in an area that is quiet and conducive to conversation.
- (3) Take notes and send a typed copy to your client within 24 hours after meeting.
- (4) Be organized—have an agenda of what you want to discuss. Bring all necessary records of the previous 12-months' business that you'll need. If there are areas where your company fell short of your customer's expectations, discuss that first and discuss how your company will prevent such problems in the future.
- (5) Most important, listen carefully for the customer's stated or implied needs, concerns, and opportunities.

C. Measure the results that your customers receive through your product or service and include the findings in your periodic reviews.

Many people in business are unable to claim that their product or service will cut costs by 20% or increase productivity by 10% because they have never measured such results! If you don't measure the success of your products, services, and solutions, who will? Be sure to measure what is really important to your customers. It may not just be *quantitative* measures. Qualitative measures such as peace of mind, lower stress levels, closer family ties, and increased enjoyment can also be monitored

and measured. And, when you do measure results, measure relevant time periods—not too short or too long.

Measuring results has several advantages:

- (1) Doing so solidifies your relationship with your customers. If results are good, they'll be glad to tell everyone inside and outside their company about you. If the results are negative, don't despair because you and your customers share the problem. You created the solution together, so you'll need to work together to solve the problem. Either way, the relationship is enhanced.
- (2) Measuring results automatically provides opportunities for your next sale. If your results are good, you're in a great position to recommend buying more, upgrading for even better results, or buying another product not yet discussed.
- (3) Measuring results quantifies your successes.

Incidentally, ask your customers what measures *they* are taking with your product or service beyond the measurements that you are following. Tell them that you would like to share their results with other customers. It's also a good measurement for you on your customers' level of satisfaction with the product or service.

D. Practice doing the "little things" that count.

There are many little things that you can do to keep in touch that can enhance your relationship with your customers. For example:

- (1) Send or FAX interesting articles that relate to them and their business and/or interests.
- (2) Introduce them to people who might have similar interests professionally or socially.
- (3) Send them birthday cards, product anniversary cards, and congratulatory cards for promotions and personal events you know of such as weddings and births.
- (4) Just call or drop by to see how things are going.
- (5) Keep a customer profile of each customer's interests, likes and dislikes, and keep adding to it after each meeting or phone call. It will become a valuable reference that will give you many other ideas for keeping in touch.
- (6) Keep in touch with those in your company who have regular contact with those in your customer's company.
- (7) Include your customers in a focus group or quality control board.
- (8) Perhaps offer to set up training programs if your customer is hiring several new employees.
- (9) Create a newsletter to educate, inform, and add value to your customer relationships. In the newsletter you can also highlight customer accomplishments and achievements.

Keeping In Touch with Your Customers

Keeping in touch with your customers appropriately is critical to your relationship with them and your success. Use this exercise to identify ways in which you can improve your “system” of keeping in touch.

1. How would you describe your current method(s) of keeping in touch with your customers?

2. Describe the follow-up schedule that you now use after a sale. If you don't have a specific schedule, describe the things that you now do following a sale:

3. Think of *all* of the possible encounters that your customers and their employees have with your company, e.g., billing, delivery, the customer service department, etc. List all of the possible encounters below:

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

4. Are you now consistently measuring the success of your products/services? _____
If not, why not?

5. Name a recent new customer: _____

What are his/her success criteria?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Are they measurable? _____

If not, rewrite each criterion below in measurable terms:

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

What is a relevant time period for your measurement of these criteria? _____

How will you relate these measurements to your customer? _____

6. What are three most memorable “keep in touch” techniques that have been *used on you* that you can adapt for your customers?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

7. What new ideas do you have on keeping in touch with your customers that you would like to try?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

2. Listen actively.

Today, more than ever, businesses must listen to their customers. Several companies today use toll free customer service numbers, focus group interviews, point-of-purchase surveys, comment cards with their product or service, mail and phone questionnaires, and many other customer feedback methods to elicit customer suggestions and complaints. These companies try to make it easy for their customers to give comments—positive *or* negative.

Believe it or not, an average of only *one in 26 customers* airs his complaints to a company, while the other 25 either:

- (1) Internalize the complaint and silently stew about it;
- (2) Complain to other people causing some of those people to avoid doing business with that company;
- (3) Or, take their business to a competitor without ever giving the first company a chance to turn the Moment of Misery into a Moment of Magic.

That's why it is crucial for you to do everything possible to keep in open, regular communication with each of your customers. Well managed companies consider customer comments and complaints as a way to learn and change.

Listening *actively* to your customers is unquestionably the level of listening that best supports strong customer relationships. It is also the most demanding and tiring method of listening because it requires the deepest level of concentration and attention.

As an active listener, you refrain from evaluating your customers' messages and try to understand their points of view. Your attention is focused on their spoken word *and* their thoughts, feelings, and intent. To listen in this way, you must suspend your personal thoughts and feelings in order to give full attention to listening to your customers. It means figuratively to "put yourself into the other person's shoes." As an active listener, you must also send both verbal and non-verbal messages to your customer indicating that what is being said is really being understood and absorbed.

Guidelines for Active Listening

It takes a period of time for good relationships to develop and listening plays an important part in that development. By following the guidelines below, you will become an *active* listener:

(1)*Let the customer talk without interruption.*

Given the chance to speak uninterrupted, people may reveal interesting facts and valuable clues to aid you in helping solve their problems or satisfy their needs—facts and clues which an interruption on your part could cut short. Allowing the other to speak keeps his attention high and greatly increases the chances of his listening when it is your turn to speak.

(2)*Listen for thoughts and feelings as well as for what is not being said.*

Listen for the customer's psychological needs, the needs behind the spoken words, and the emotions conveyed through vocal and visual messages. These can be subtle and difficult to define, but are clues that will help you immensely in your understanding. Ask yourself these questions:

"What is my customer feeling?"

"What does this customer mean?"

"Why is this customer saying this?"

"What is implied by what is being said?"

(3)*Empathize with your customers.*

Make a determined effort to see their point of view. Judge the value of the message, not the delivery. Don't allow your mental impression of the customers influence your interpretation of their messages.

(4)*Let your customer know that you are listening.*

Acknowledge what your customers say with unobtrusive head nods, "I understand's" and "I see's". These will not be taken as interruptions.

Phrases like, "Tell me more about that" or "Can you give me an example?" or, "Then what?" are referred to as expansion or clarifying questions. Besides providing you with more information, they indicate your attention and invite your customer to concur, correct, continue, or elaborate.

(5) *Minimize the impact of distractions.*

Clear the distractions around you whenever possible—ringing telephones, high noise levels, interruptions, etc. You also need to clear your internal distractions—concerns about your family or upcoming deadlines—anything that might keep you from devoting 100% of your attention to your customers. All of those worries or distractions will still be waiting for you once you’re finished with the customer.

Force yourself to focus attention only on the words, ideas, and feelings, and underlying clues to your customers’ intent. Judge the value of what they say, and respond to it rather than to their ability or method of saying it. Catch yourself falling into emotional deaf spots—words, phrases or references that may cause your mind to wander.

(6) *Motivate yourself to listen.*

There is no such thing as an uninteresting speaker—only a disinterested listener.

(7) *Take notes and organize what you hear.*

Don’t trust your memory. Take notes by jotting down key phrases and words to jog your memory of important thoughts expressed. Taking notes also helps you focus on what your customers are saying and to identify main themes and supporting points in what they are saying.

(8) *Validate your understanding of what your customers say.*

Constantly check your understanding of what your customers say with comments and responses. Be observant as well and notice if your customers want to respond or comment on anything you have said.

HOW DO YOUR LISTENING SKILLS RATE?

Actively listening to your customers, as it was defined in this section, is essential if you are to develop successful, long-term relationships with them.

Take a moment to respond to the following by circling the appropriate response, **A= Always; S= Sometimes; N= Never**. Respond *honestly* to each of the items—no one is going to review or use this survey but you.

1. When listening to my customers, I hold my comments until they are finished, even though my comments may have direct relevance to what they are saying at that moment.
A S N
2. When talking with my customer, I try to read what’s going on behind their spoken words by asking myself what they might be feeling, why they are saying what they are saying, and what is *implied* by what they say. **A S N**
3. When in my customers’ offices or talking with them on the phone, I acknowledge what they are saying with “I understand’s,” and “I see’s.” **A S N**
4. I let my customers know that I am listening and trying to understand what they say by using phrases like, “Tell me more about that,” or, “Can you give me an example?” or “Then what?” **A S N**

5. While talking with my customers, I don't let myself get distracted with thoughts about their office decor, their clothing or hairstyles. **A S N**
6. I do not let ringing telephones or busy street traffic or hallway chatter distract my attention from what my customers are saying. **A S N**
7. I judge and respond to only the value of what is being said rather than the way and manner in which my customers say it. **A S N**
8. When I am talking with my customers, my mind is completely absorbed by what they are saying and my mind never wanders. **A S N**
9. When I am talking with my customers in their offices, I read their body language as well to fully interpret what they are telling me. **A S N**
10. I find myself completely motivated and *wanting* to listen to my customers. **A S N**
11. I take notes whenever I talk with my customers. **A S N**
12. As I take notes in my meetings and telephone conversations with my customers, I jot down the main themes and supporting points of what they say. **A S N**

Now that you have responded to the items above, you have a road map for improving of your active listening skills. Any item marked as "Sometimes" or "Never" indicates a listening skill that needs improvement. For any item marked as "Always"—Congratulations!

CONCLUSION

Effective communication is very important when dealing with your customers if you are going to develop the important relationships that result in retaining their business over the long-term. Keeping in touch appropriately and listening actively are important in your day-to-day dealings with your customers.

As important as your day-to-day dealings with your customers are, at no time are your communication skills more essential than when dealing with the unhappy—sometimes the irate—customer. It is at these crucial moments that being able to use your communication skills effectively *in conjunction with* a well defined conflict resolution system—the topic of the next section—will save both your relationship with your customers as well as their continued business.

7

SERVICE LANGUAGE

Unfortunately, customer encounters do not always run smoothly. Sometimes the customer's expectations may not be met. This could be due to something outside your direct control, or because of something you did. The thing that separates the outstanding service professional from the mediocre is how they deal with unhappy customers.

As we begin to explore ways to service the unhappy customer, there is a formula you should keep in mind... $S + T = R$.

The S in the formula stands for Situation. And the R stand for Response.

Now, many people go through life as if $S=R$. As if the situation creates their response. You hear this in the way they talk, "He made me so angry." Or, "She really upset me." In other words, their behavior caused me to respond this way. But if you think about it, can $S=R$? No. If it did, we would all respond alike to the same situations. That would mean we would all like the same food, the same music, the same hobbies, because the situation creates the response. No. There has to be another component and that component is T.

So, what does the T stand for?

Well, T stands for Thinking. The situation, plus how we think about the situation, creates our response. Have you ever been home late at night by yourself, not expecting anyone, and heard the sound of footsteps outside your front door. What is your response? Well, if you're like most people, it's concern or even fear. But, how about that same sound or footstep if you're expecting a loved one. Different reaction? But the sounds are the same. What made the difference? Obviously, it is how you interpret the sound or how you THINK about it.

Let's look at how this applies to unhappy customers. Many people view the complaining customer as a problem, as something to be avoided. And while I agree they are not always the most pleasant, they actually are more of an opportunity than a problem.

What? An opportunity?

Yes, they are an opportunity. Actually, when you get right down to it, they are doing us a favor. Let's look again at some of the customer research that makes this clear.

According to a study conducted by TARP, the average company never hears from 96% of its unhappy customers. They don't complain. They don't fuss. They just don't come back.

That same study found that customers who do complain are three to five times more likely to do business with you again than non-complainers, if their problem is taken care of quickly and with a sense of concern. Even if the problem isn't resolved, twice as many complainers as non-complainers will do business with you again.

So the upset, complaining customer really presents you with a unique opportunity. What they are really asking is for you to help them find some way to stay your customer. And since sales and marketing research shows it costs four times more to get a new customer than to keep a current one, every complaining customer you keep gives you a definite competitive advantage.

You've seen how important satisfying unhappy or upset customers can be. Before we look at skills and approaches for serving them though, let's look at what upsets customers. It's important in working with unhappy customers to know what creates their unhappiness in the first place.

Earlier, we looked at your experiences of positive service. Now, let's use your experiences as a customer to explore "Moments of Misery." Those are the situations which frustrate, irritate and annoy us as customers. What creates service misery for you when you are the customer?

Personal Misery Experience

Think of a specific time where you *as the customer* experienced a moment of misery. What is it that frustrates, irritates or annoys you, when you are the customer? Be specific.

[illegible]

Write out below examples of what you say to customers about policies, procedures, requirements, etc. Write direct quotes that someone would hear if they were listening to you with the customer. You will use this exercise later in the program.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

As we saw earlier, a great deal of what creates a positive experience for a customer is how they are treated at the Personal level. The same tends to be true for what creates misery. Again, it is how you treat customers that has a large impact on their evaluation of service.

One of the biggest factors in the Personal level is how you communicate with the customer. There are many elements that make up your communication. It's not just what you say, but also how you say it. When servicing a customer face-to-face, your message is made up of three primary elements - the Vocal--your voice and how it sounds, the Visual--your body language and facial expressions, and the Verbal--the actual words you use. It's important to have all three elements working in your favor when you're dealing with an unhappy or upset customer.

When working with customers, it is important to make sure all the elements of your communication convey a sincere desire to be of service. This is especially important when

handling an upset or unhappy customer. You'll want to make sure your voice, body and words are communicating Respect, Responsiveness and Responsibility.

If you work with customers over the phone, you might assume there are only two channels to your communication -- the Verbal and the Vocal. However, that's not the case. Researchers have discovered people can actually tell over the phone whether or not you are smiling. Yes, you CAN hear a smile over the phone. And your body language carries over in your voice tone. A good rule is to assume the same body language and facial expressions over the phone as you would if the person were standing right in front of you. This way your voice tone will convey alertness and a readiness to help.

Some researchers estimate that as much as 70 to 90 percent of the way a customer perceives your communication is based on your Verbal and Visual cues. Here are some strategies for making the visual and vocal channels--your body and voice-- work for you. First, put a pleasant, attentive look on your face. Smile, if appropriate. And, if face to face, make good eye-contact with customers. Turn your body toward them and give them your full attention. Put away anything that might distract you from customers. Remember, they are the most important thing for the moment, so focus on them fully.

Make sure to sit or stand up straight. This will make your voice more full and powerful. When you're all hunched over, you sound weak and ineffective--not a good way to come across when dealing with an upset customer.

Also, remember to breathe regularly and evenly. Many people start to almost hold their breath when dealing with an upset customer. This not only makes you sound tight and unsure, but actually reduces your ability to think and be creative. By breathing deep and evenly, you help maintain your cool and can stay creative in your responses.

Visual _____

Vocal _____

Now, let's examine the third component of communication—the Verbal, the actual words and phrases that you use.

Before getting to the specifics about service language, let's examine how language in general works. When someone uses a certain word, we make sense of that word based on our past experiences. If they use a word we've never heard, it will be meaningless to us. While a dictionary contains definitions of words, in real life, words take on their meanings from their usage. It is how the word is generally used that determines its meaning for people and, therefore, how they will respond to it.

Our words create reactions based on people's experience with those words. Given this is how language works, you can begin to see how the way we say something will have a significant impact on how a customer might react or respond.

Here's an illustration. Suppose you were coming to my house for dinner. And since I want you to enjoy your evening, I'd like to know which of two items you would prefer I prepare as the main course. Your first choice is a slowly, decaying muscle segment, sliced from the hind quarter of a young castrated bull. Your second choice is a nice, juicy filet mignon. Which would you prefer? Obviously, they're the same thing. But, they do create two very different responses.

The same applies when working with customers. You can give identical information but create two very different messages depending on how you say it—your choice of words and phrases. In fact, let's examine a number of words and phrases that tend to create a negative response in customers. We'll examine each word or phrase, why it creates difficulty with customers, and then explore alternatives to use instead. Keep in mind as we review the words, there are perfectly good situations to use each of the words we will list. Each one though can be thought of as a trap-door that might spring open beneath you and drop you into the abyss of customer anger, frustration or defensiveness.

The first word on our list of negative impact language is “Can't.” Both “you can't” and “I can't” invite negative responses from customers.

When someone says to you, “YOU can't do that.,” what's your reaction? Most people respond with something like, “I'll show you” or “Oh, yes I can.” It's heard as a challenge, if it is something that the customer really wants.

“I can't” is also a phrase to avoid. Earlier we talked about the importance of voice tone. Even when you use a strong, powerful voice tone like “I CAN'T”, psychologically it sounds like (whining tone) “I can't ...they won't let me.” It psychologically has a whine to it and puts you in a one-down position to the customer. Often they will respond with something like “Well, get me someone who can”. Even if they don't say anything like that, it still is a powerless or helpless word.

Instead of “can't”, use “can”. Many times it is just as easy to say what you can do as it is to say what you can't do. For example, instead of “I can't get that out until next week.” You could just as easily say “I can get that right out to you next week.” Or, instead of “I can't do this without a supervisors approval,” you could say, “I can check with my supervisor to see if she will approve this.” You can probably think of many times when you could have just as easily used can and said what you could do, rather than can't and say what you couldn't do. Stating positively what you can or will do creates a stronger, more resourceful perception of you in the customer's mind.

There are those times, however, when you really can't and there aren't any positive ways to state the same information. In those situations, use the word unable. Unable has less of the psychological whine to it and keeps you from getting one-down with the customer. While it

doesn't mean that the customer will be happy to hear that you are unable to do what they might want, it doesn't sound as powerless and helpless as can't. Unable is more of a power neutral word. Think about where you might use it instead.

The next item on our list is similar in that it too sounds weak and powerless and it's the phrase "I'll try."

When do you usually tell someone you'll try? Normally, you use it when you think there's a possibility you won't be able to do something. In customer service, it's often used as a way to put off the customer or end the conversation, at least for the moment. "Well, I'll try (sigh)" --knowing full well that it's not going to happen. It's just an out for now.

The difficulty is the customer often hears it as a commitment. "I'll try to get it sent today." is heard more as "I'll get it sent today." Creating an expectation in the customer's mind that it is being sent. It's important to remember that the key to creating satisfied customers is meeting their expectations. By using "I'll try" you often set up an expectation that has a high probability of not being met. This will just lead to more frustration for the customer and you--or at least someone at the organization--later on when the customer is disappointed.

Rather than "I'll try," use "I will." Now, there is one caution here. Say "I will" to the actions you will take, not the results you will create. For example, if you're dealing with an upset customer who demands your manager call them back within an hour, can you control whether she actually calls back or not? No, of course not. So you wouldn't say to the customer "I'll have her call you back." That's committing to the outcome which is not under your control. You can commit to giving her the message since it is your action and thus under your control. Say something like, "I will see she gets the message and knows you want a call back as soon as possible."

The next word to be aware of is "Policy." Have you ever been a customer and had a person say to you "Our policy is..." or "That's not our policy.?" What's your reaction when you hear that? Most people report feeling defensive, like the door has been shut in their face, or that the person who said it has no interest in helping them. Unlike the first two examples, there is not an easy word to substitute for policy. Rather, instead of quoting policy, provide information, options or explanations.

Similar to the approach with the word "can't," if you can provide some positive options for the customer and give them a choice, it demonstrates a stronger service commitment. Also, many times what the customer needs is some information that will help them at least get some satisfaction.

Let's stop now and give you a chance to discover where you can use more positive service language rather than Can't, I'll try, and Policy.

SERVICE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

Written Exercise

In the statements below, circle the negative impact words or phrases. Next rewrite the statements using more positive service languages.

1. I can't get that to you until tomorrow. _____

2. You can't return that without a receipt. _____

3. I'll try to get some information on this and call you back. _____

4. I can't do that it's against company policy. _____

5. Well, I'll try to see if anyone knows about this. _____

EXAMINING YOUR LANGUAGE

Written exercise and practice

Turn back to page 29 and see if any of your statements contain any negative impact language. Write out below how you could restate them using more positive service language. (If none of your written statements contain any of the negative impact words, think of situations where you use them, but didn't write them down.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Let's continue to explore words and phrases that can produce a negative effect with customers.

Avoid using the word "But." Think of BUT as a giant eraser. It erases everything you said just before it. For example, "I'd really like to help you BUT..."; "I know you need this right away, BUT ...". As soon as the customer hears the word BUT, they start mentally preparing for the negative.

But is a lot like Policy. Usually, as soon as customers hear it, they stop listening and start getting defensive.

So what do you replace But with? You can replace But with "And" in many cases. For example instead of "I'd really like to help you, but I don't have that information." you could say, "I really want to help you and the best way to do that will be to put you in touch with the people who have that information." Or, instead of "I know you need this right away, but until I get payment on your past due account, I can't ship it," say, "I know you need this right away and as soon as I receive the payment on your account, I'll be able to ship it."

There will be situations where you won't be able to use And as a substitute, though you will find many places that you can, once you begin to look for them. For those situations where And does not work use "However." It's not quite as strong, and doesn't invite quite as negative a response, as But.

So, replace But with And, or sometimes with However.

Next, be aware of the phrase "I'll have to." When you hear something like, "I'll have to check and get back to you," or, "I'll have to see if we have any available," how does it sound? It sounds like it's such an effort or they're going way out of their way to help you. Replace the "Have to" with "Happy to." "I'll be happy to check and call you back," or, "I'll be happy to see if we have any available," sounds much more service oriented, doesn't it? You don't always have to use "Happy to." For variety, you can use "I'll be glad to" or even "I will."

Speaking of "have to," it also belongs to a whole category of words that tend to invite negative reactions from customers. They are the "Telling" words and phrases. Things like You have to, You should, You need to, or it's required or necessary for you to. What's your reaction when someone says to you "You have to take care of this now."? For most people, it tends to create some resentment or at least resistance. We don't like to be told what to do. We prefer, and so do our customers, to be asked or to be given options rather than to be TOLD.

A good substitute for many of the telling phrases is "If you will..." Especially if you follow it with the consequence of the customer doing so is them getting something they want or need. Rather than saying "You'll have to call back later," try saying instead "If you will call back later, I'll have an answer for you." Or, instead of saying "You'll need to see the manager," try saying "If you will wait and talk with the manager, she will be able to assist you." This approach gives the customer a sense of control. If they are unwilling to wait, call back, provide you with the information, or whatever, you can simply and politely tell them that you will be UNABLE to do whatever they need done.

Another word to be careful with is "Why." It's a perfectly good word, however, remember that words get their meanings from how they are used. How was this word most often used on you as a child? Yeah, usually to place blame or guilt, like "Why did you do that?" "Why didn't you call?" "Why do you want that?" Even as adults, when someone asks us why we did something or why we chose something, we feel a need to justify or defend ourselves. Much less loaded emotionally than Why are the words How and What. Any Why question can be restated as a How or What question. For example, instead of "Why did you do that?" say "What caused

you to do that?" "Why did you chose that?" can become "How did you decide on that?" Using How or What in place of Why usually gets you better information because the person doesn't feel threatened. Just make sure your voice tone sounds inquiring, not blaming. Remember that the power of your voice tone determines the message a person recieves. In fact, for all of the verbal changes we are suggesting, if the voice tone doesn't match, just changing the words will make little difference.

While we're on voice tone, a phrase that's often used with a tone that invites defensiveness or anger is "What's the problem?" or worse yet, "What's your problem?"

Often, a customer may not really have a problem. They may have a question, a need for information or even just some confusion. When we ask "What's the problem?," they have to create one for us to answer their question.

To end this section on service language on a postitive note, there are words and phrases that create a positive effect with customers. Using "Please" and "Thank-you" is always a good idea. "I understand" and "How can I help" are good phrases to use. And an appropriate use of the customer's name creates a positive impression.

Remember, you can give a customer exactly the same information, but create two very different responses simply by how you state it. Make sure your voice, body language and words are helping you create a Service Advantage.

SERVICE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

Written exercise #2

In the statements below, circle the negative impact words or phrases. Next rewrite the statements using more positive service language.

1. So what's the problem?

2. Well why did you do that?

3. I'd really like to help you, but I can't it's against company policy.

4. You'll need to wait, I have to see if my manager is available.

5. You'll have to give me more information than that.

EXAMINING YOUR LANGUAGE

Written exercise and practice #2

Turn back to page 29 and see if any of your statements contain any negative impact language. Write out below how you could restate them using more positive service language. (If none of your written statements contain any of the negative impact words, think of situations where you know you use them, but didn't write them down.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

8

CONFLICT RESOLUTION SYSTEM— A Key Relationship Builder

Uh-oh. Even with your sincere commitment, your consistent practice of staying in touch with your customers, and your excellent communication skills, A Moment of Misery occurs for one of your customers. Now what?

No matter how good you are, no matter how committed you are, no matter how many systems you have in place for superior customer service, something is going to go wrong sometime. What's worse, it may very well have nothing to do with you. Now you must try to turn that Moment of Misery into a Moment of Magic. Building and keeping strong customer relationships require it.

With Moments of Misery, a customer will typically feel one of three degrees of dissatisfaction:

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|--|
| (1) | <i>Bothered</i> | Customers are bothered when service falls short of their expectations, disappoints them slightly or surprises them negatively, but does not cause inconvenience. |
| (2) | <i>Irritated</i> | Customers become irritated when they are annoyed by poor service, somewhat inconvenienced or have lost time but not money. |
| (3) | <i>Abused</i> | Customers feel abused when they are grossly inconvenienced, have lost time and money, are personally insulted or unfairly treated, or are made angry or upset. |

When handling dissatisfied customers, it is important to determine to what degree they are dissatisfied. The more upset, the greater and faster your efforts will have to be to correct the situation. To determine the customer's degree of dissatisfaction, you must do:

1. *Actively listen.*

Observe your customer's body language, read between the lines, and tune into your customer.

2. *Ask questions.*

Seek clarification and avoid misunderstandings. Find out how your customer would like to see the problem resolved.

3. *Trade places.*

Put yourself into your customer's place and imagine the frustration *you* would feel.

After following these steps, you will then be able to determine the degree of your customer's dissatisfaction as well as respond accordingly.

<i>When your customer is:</i>	<i>You need to:</i>
Bothered	1. Express concern and apologize. 2. Immediately make things right. 3. Follow up.
Irritated	1. Express concern and apologize. 2. Immediately make things right. 3. Acknowledge the problem and show empathy. 4. Follow up.
Abused	1. Express concern and apologize. 2. Immediately make things right. 3. Acknowledge the problem and show empathy. 4. Make a gesture of compensation. 5. Follow up.

LEVELS OF CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION

Every day you are a customer. From time to time, you experience various degrees of dissatisfaction. Review each of the degrees of dissatisfaction below and then jot down some examples from your own experience.

1st Degree: BOTHERED

Customers are bothered when service falls below their expectations, disappoints them slightly, or surprises them (negatively), but does *not* cause inconvenience.

Examples from your own experience:

1. _____
2. _____

2nd Degree: IRRITATED

Customers become irritated when they are annoyed by poor service, are mildly inconvenienced, or have lost time but not money.

Examples from your own experience:

1. _____
2. _____

3rd Degree: ABUSED

Customers feel abused by you or your company when they are grossly inconvenienced, have lost a lot of time or even a little money, are personally insulted, unfairly treated, or made angry or upset.

Examples from your own experience:

1. _____
2. _____

The Conflict Resolution System

No matter how good the relationship is, people are going to run into problems. Consequently there should be a system in place to make it easy for customers to tell you when they have a problem as early as possible. The earlier you find out about a Moment of Misery, the easier, faster, and less expensive it is to solve. Once you are aware of the problem, you should have techniques, systems, and procedures in place to resolve it.

Your communication skills definitely come into play as you resolve the problem through an effective conflict resolution system. Resolving problems and conflict, believe it or not, is not as difficult as you may think. Gregg Baron and Robert Coates of Success Sciences, Inc. suggest several steps:

1. *Handle the person first, then the problem.*

Let angry people vent their frustrations. This alone will go a long way toward resolving the problem.

2. *Apologize.*

This is often left out, but it is a crucial gesture. Offer a sincere, *personal* apology, not one on behalf of the company. show that you are committed to the relationship.

3. *Show empathy.*

Assure your customer that he has every right to be angry and disappointed and that you would feel the same way if it happened to you.

4. *Find a solution.*

Resolve the problem *with* your customer, not *for* the customer. Ask questions that will get the customer involved in the process. Some possible questions might be:

- a. “How would you like to see this problem resolved?”
- b. “What would be an acceptable resolution to this problem?”
- c. “If you were in my position, how might you resolve this kind of problem for *your* customer?”
- d. “Would a refund be acceptable to you?”

5. *Jump through hoops.*

Immediately take over and make the recovery process easy for your customer. If there are phone calls to make or forms to fill out, you assume responsibility and do the work. If the resolution of the problem is going to be *complicated*, explain the system to your customer. People feel much better when they are informed rather than kept in the dark.

6. *Offer compensation.*

If the Moment of Misery was severe enough, you need to say, “I’m sorry,” with a concrete gesture. Compensation should be:

a. *Immediate*

Giving a gift long after the fact renders it meaningless and appears insincere. Give the gift immediately. For this reason, it must be clear to you what the parameters are for compensating customers as you see fit.

b. *Meaningful*

A meaningful gift is something that has high perceived value to your customer. It should also differentiate you from your competition. Be creative—customize the gift to your customer’s personality. Don’t send flowers or a box of candy—everyone does that. Know your customer well enough to determine if a pair of tickets to a baseball game or a hot air balloon ride would be appropriate.

c. *Consumable*

If you send a calendar or a clock to say, “I’m sorry,” your customer will be reminded of the incident every time she looks at it. Save those gifts for positive occasions. Your customer should be able to eat or use your recovery gift relatively soon. That way, the gift is appreciated and then out of sight and out of mind.

It should not be expensive. The combination of high perceived value and low cost to the company is ideal, especially if you are compensating customers regularly. Giving away more of your company’s products or services may be appropriate (and inexpensive), but only if they won’t cause more problems. The worst thing you can do is offer customers more of something that has already caused them grief.

7. *Follow up.*

After resolving the problem, with or without a gift, you must follow up. As with any follow up, you will not only make sure things are satisfactory, but you will also look for additional needs that represent selling opportunities. Follow up is essential because there is nothing worse than a fouled-up recovery. A recovery snafu is a guaranteed way to lose a customer forever.

Moments of Misery will happen—hopefully not often, but they will happen. But when they do occur, it is a sound strategy to view those problems as the *opportunities* that they are—they give you the opportunity to show your customers just how much you care about them. Having an effective conflict resolution system in place and being prepared to use it, will help you turn those occasional Moments of Misery into Moments of Magic.

APPROPRIATE HANDLING OF CUSTOMER PROBLEMS

Recall how you felt in each of the situations you jotted down on the previous page. Now, identify one typical problem from each level of dissatisfaction and write out what you would say and do in each of those situations.

1st Degree: BOTHERED

Typical Problem: _____

What I would say and do to resolve this situation:

2nd Degree: IRRITATED

Typical Problem: _____

What I would say and do to resolve this situation:

Third Degree: ABUSED

Typical Problem: _____

What I would say and do to resolve this situation:

9

SERVICING THE UNHAPPY CUSTOMER

The unhappy or upset customer is really an opportunity. How do you take advantage of this opportunity though? A good starting place is to recognize a principle borrowed from sales. “Customers don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” In sales, that means getting to know your customers and their needs before trying to tell them what you can do for them. In serving the unhappy customer, it means making sure the customer feels you care and are concerned about them and their situation, not just going through the motions of providing a solution.

Even the most challenging of all customers, the Irate customer, wants to know someone cares about what’s going on. In fact, if you listen carefully to the irate customer, you’ll discover the true message is I-Rate. Treat me as if my situation is important. Unless you do, you may take care of the problem, and still not take care of the customer. To create a service advantage and capitalize on these opportunities, it’s important to take care of both the problem and the customer.

Remember the Personal and Performance model used earlier to examine the two levels of a service encounter? Well, when you are dealing with the unhappy customer, it is important to address both levels. Take care of the problem and take care of the customer. Letting the customer know how much you care, before you show them how much you know, will help you do just that.

Earlier you saw how important it was to address the 3-R’s of customer expectations-- Respect, Responsiveness, and Responsibility. When serving the upset or unhappy customer, add to the 3-R’s the 3-A’s -- Attend, Acknowledge and Answer. Following these three A’s will help ensure you take care of the customer as well as take care of the problem.

When confronted by an unhappy customer, first Attend. Make sure you give them your full and undivided attention. Put away anything else and focus strictly on the customer. All of the skills you developed to show respect come into play here. If you are face to face with the customer, make sure they have your eye-contact; use appropriate facial expressions to let them know you are listening; and take notes, if needed, to show your concern for getting things right.

On the phone, make sure to put away all distractions and focus on the caller. Use vocal prompts, such as “Uhhmm,” “I see,” and “Yes” to make sure the customer feels heard. Take notes here too, if appropriate, and let your customers know you’ve made them an interest to

take care of them. And, whether it is face-to-face or by phone, always make sure your voice tone and body language communicate concern and interest.

Ask questions to determine what the situation is and how the customer sees it. It's often tempting to want to jump right in and provide an answer or solution. In fact, have you ever started to provide a solution to some problem and then have the customer say, "No, that's not what I really want?" Asking questions will help ensure that you know what the customer needs. Ask questions that demonstrate your desire to fully understand so you can be of the most help.

And perhaps most important of all, listen to the customer. And listen without interrupting. If you've been serving customers for a long time, you've already had upset customers say to you "Well, I just wanted to tell somebody." So, let them tell you. What they are really saying is, "I just wanted someone to listen." An important listening principle to keep in mind with the upset customer is, "It's not enough to listen. You must make the other person feel heard and understood."

Attending fully and listening will help make the customer feel heard. This step alone can go a long way toward defusing an upset customer. Most of us in the service business want to immediately jump in with answers or solutions when confronted with a problem by a customer. Often, though, that just escalates the customer's frustration because they aren't getting what they need at the Personal level -- to feel heard and feel that they rate. When faced with an upset or unhappy customer, remember to first Attend.

Once you've given the customer your full attention, asked questions, and listened to them, it's time for you to respond. Here too, though, you will be more effective with the upset customer if you resist the urge to immediately give an answer or solution. Remember "It's not enough to listen, you must make the customer feel heard and understood." The next of our three A's, Acknowledging, accomplishes just that.

Acknowledging is letting the customer know you have heard and understood what they said and what they are experiencing. It can range from simply repeating back some key information to expressing empathy or concern for the customer. While a person most wants to get their problem solved, they also want to be taken seriously and to feel someone cared. Taking the time to Acknowledge addresses this need and increases a customer's openness to your solutions or answers. Using this "A" consistently with your customers will definitely add to their experience of your Service Advantage.

A simple form of Acknowledging is to paraphrase some of the information the customer gives you. When paraphrasing, you repeat back some of what the customer said, in your own words. It's important, when Acknowledging, that you not mimic back the customer's exact words.

Generally, with paraphrasing, you will be confirming your understanding of the situation or of important information. By covering the key information, you demonstrate that you obviously have been listening and are taking the customer seriously.

Paraphrasing generally deals with the Performance level information. It's also important to make the customer feel understood at the Personal level. Empathy is a good way of doing this. Empathy communicates you've heard and understood not only the information the customer is giving you, but also what he or she is feeling and experiencing. It validates the customer and shows real concern.

Another powerful dynamic of using empathy is that customers aren't expecting it. Most customers are used to getting cold or indifferent treatment when they complain. A lot of service people even get argumentative or defensive. When the customer complains and gets upset, and

you respond with empathy and concern, it positively throws them off track. A lot of customers are prepared for defensiveness or hassles. They have their arguments all prepared for it. But, when you respond with genuine interest and concern, it often takes them by surprise and allows you to move the conversation on to a reasonable and productive track.

Another form of Acknowledgement is a simple apology. If your organization has dropped the ball somehow, don't be afraid to apologize for it. Just admit a mistake was made, apologize for it and tell how you are going to correct the situation.

One caution: Acknowledgment is not about learning some technique or trick phrases. It's about listening to the customer and connecting with what they are experiencing. To be effective in defusing upset customers, you must begin with a genuine desire to understand and help. If you listen with a true desire to help, you will find a natural way to Attend and Acknowledge -- creating your unique Service Advantage.

Through your Attending and Acknowledging, you have shown the customer how much you care. Now it is time to show them how much you know. The final of the 3-A's for serving upset customers is to "Answer."

Finally, you get to go with what was probably your first impulse--solve the problem for the customer. Here you provide them with a solution, options or information that will take care of the situation. Just as the first of our 3-R's of Customer Expectations, Respect, played an important part in Attending, the last 2-R's, Responsiveness and Responsibility, play a major role in the "Answer" step for serving upset customers.

The key to this step is being confident and decisive in your response. Communicate that you know how to help this person and how eager you are to do so. Take action!

Sometimes, you may not be the person who can solve the situation or the one who has the information the customer needs. Remember from the R, Responsibility, you still own the customer and their needs. Get them to the person who can best help them. Let them know what actions you are going to take to get them the information or the person they need. The more you communicate you are a proactive person willing to take responsibility for their satisfaction, the more of their trust and confidence you will gain.

When providing the customer with an Answer to their needs, make it as easy on the customer as possible. If you can take some action on the customer's behalf, do so. Remember, they are already unhappy with something about you or your organization, so make it easy on them to get their problem resolved.

Put yourself in the customer's shoes. What would you want someone to do if you were the customer? How would you want them to handle it?

Another good strategy is to ask the customer what would it take to satisfy them. One organization made this a regular part of how they served upset customers. After Attending and Acknowledging, they would ask "Mr. or Ms. Customer, what would it take to make this right?" To their surprise, over 75% of the people asked for less than what the employee had originally planned to do. While many service people are afraid to ask the question, if you've really done a good job of Attending and Acknowledging, most people won't ask for the moon.

Depending on your business, a really powerful part of your answer can be a compensating gesture. A compensating gesture is something that says to the customer, "We're sorry. We recognize that you have been inconvenienced and we want to make it up to you." Restaurants often do this. If there has been a problem with the meal, they will offer a free dessert or drink to attempt to compensate.

Compensating gestures should have a perceived value to the customer. Generally, they should cost the company little in comparison to the value to the customer. They should be consumable, something the customer can use or consume but won't be around to continually remind them of what was a problem in the first place. They should also be something you can control and can provide immediately.

One last part of the Answer stage is follow-up and follow-through. Make sure that whatever is needed to care for this customer is done. Remember, you or your organization have already not met their expectations in some way. Make sure that when you attempt to resolve their situation, that everything that needs to happen does happen. Don't take anything for granted. Follow-through and, if appropriate, follow-up with the customer-- a call or a note to see if they are now satisfied and happy with your service.

Remember when you are dealing with the upset customer that "Customers don't care how much you know, until the know how much you care." By practicing the 3-A's, Attend, Acknowledge, and Answer, you will show how much you care and how much you know, allowing you to take care of not just the problem, but also take care of the customer.

3-A'S FOR SERVING THE UNHAPPY CUSTOMER

Attend

When dealing with an unhappy customer it is crucial that you give them your undivided attention and let them know you are focusing totally on them. What will you do to fully Attend to your customer?

One of the biggest challenges of fully Attending to an unhappy customer is distractions. What are the primary distractions you face and how can you minimize them?

Distraction	Strategy
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

ACKNOWLEDGING

Written Practice

The key to Acknowledging is making the customer feel heard and understood. Remember “customers don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” Write out an Acknowledgment you can use to respond to the following customer statements. (**Hint:** It helps to read them with an upset voice tone. Also, beware of putting that big eraser - But at the end of you Acknowledgment.)

1. This is ridiculous. I don’t want the run around, I just want this taken care of now.

2. I’ve already gone through this twice. I don’t want to have to explain it all again.

3. I need this taken care of right away.

4. I want to speak to your manager, right now!

Ideas

For Acknowledging to be effective in defusing the upset customer it must be sincere. Memorizing stock responses will sound false and not be effective. What are some Acknowledgment responses that will be natural for you in working with your customers?

COMPENSATING GESTURE IDEAS

What are some of the things you can do or offer to recover with an unhappy or upset customer?

CUSTOMER-DRIVEN SERVICE—

A Conclusion

Meeting standards of excellence in business has always been important, but in today's marketplace, it is absolutely essential for your company's success and survival. To meet those standards of excellence, your company and every one of its representatives in every one of its departments must have a *customer-driven* orientation and provide *customer-driven* service.

A Quick Review . . .

For a company to have a customer-driven orientation and for its representatives to provide customer-driven service, three key components must be practiced consistently: Commitment, Communication, and a Conflict Resolution System.

<i>Commitment</i>	There must be commitment to customer-driven service that permeates <i>all</i> levels of a company including the C.E.O., every manager, all salespeople, receptionists, secretaries, phone operators, and custodians. A company may say it has a customer-driven philosophy, but if every single person does not put it into practice, then it is <i>not</i> a customer-driven company.
<i>Communication</i>	There must be effective communication that builds solid relationships built on trust. Effective communication can create memorable Moments of Magic. Perhaps more importantly, it can turn Moments of Misery into <i>appreciated</i> Moments of Magic. Keeping in touch appropriately, listening actively, and asking purposeful questions must be practiced consistently if communication on all levels is to be effective.
<i>Conflict Resolution System</i>	And finally, a sound conflict resolution process must be in place that is well understood and can be put into immediate action when necessary to ensure that problems are resolved quickly, efficiently, and to the satisfaction of the customer.

Providing Customer-Driven Service is essential in today's marketplace. Customers will give their business to where they find the greatest value, and a company's customer-driven orientation will give them that advantage. You are that service advantage.

11

ACTION PLAN— What Will You Do?

In this program you've seen that how you interact with your customer can create a unique Service Advantage for your company. What specific actions do you plan to take to make that Advantage a reality?

1. Now that you are familiar with Customer-Driven Service, what do you see as your strengths in Customer-Driven Service?
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____
 - (c) _____
 - (d) _____
 - (e) _____

2. What do you see as your weaknesses in providing Customer-Driven Service and what actions can you take to correct those weaknesses?

<i>WEAKNESS</i>	<i>ACTIONS TO TAKE FOR IMPROVEMENT</i>
1.	1. 2. 3. 4.
2.	1. 2. 3. 4.
3.	1. 2. 3. 4.

3. While working through this material, what ideas did you discover (or re-discover) that you want to put into practice?

() _____

() _____

() _____

Review your list above and number each one in order of priority from 1 to 3.

4. Using your #1 priority identified above, complete the following chart to “map out” your implementation of that idea. Identify the necessary tasks to be done, determine their logical sequence by numbering them in the column at the left, and indicate a completion date.

<i>Idea to Implement:</i> _____		
<i>Time Frame:</i> Begin by: _____ Complete by: _____		
<i>Order #</i>	<i>Tasks to Complete for Implementation</i>	<i>Date to be completed</i>

Complete a chart for the next two priorities identified for #3.

<i>Idea to Implement:</i> _____		
<i>Time Frame:</i> Begin by: _____ Complete by: _____		
<i>Order #</i>	<i>Tasks to Complete for Implementation</i>	<i>Date to be completed</i>

<i>Idea to Implement:</i> _____		
<i>Time Frame:</i> Begin by: _____ Complete by: _____		
<i>Order #</i>	<i>Tasks to Complete for Implementation</i>	<i>Date to be completed</i>

Use these charts to monitor and evaluate your progress. Without written plans, your intentions will remain good but will remain just that—good intentions. To see progress, improvement, and full implementation, *written plans are a must.*



Tony Alessandra, PhD, CSP, CPAE

Building Customers, Relationships, and the Bottom-Line

Dr. Tony Alessandra helps companies build customers, relationships, and the bottom-line. Audiences learn how to outmarket, outsell, and outservice the competition by applying Dr. Alessandra's marketing, sales, service, and relationship-building skills.

Tony has a street-wise, college-smart perspective on business, achieving success as a graduate professor of marketing, entrepreneur, author, and consultant. He

earned his PhD in marketing from Georgia State University and was inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame in 1985.

Dr. Alessandra is the co-founder of MentorU.com, an online e-learning company providing training and coaching utilizing the latest Internet technologies.

Dr. Alessandra is a widely published author with 14 books translated into 14 foreign languages including *The Platinum Rule* and *The Art of Managing People*. He is featured in over 50 audio/video programs and films, including *The Dynamics of Effective Listening* and *Non-Manipulative Selling*.

Tony Alessandra reaches people - from the Board of Directors to the front-line employees. He delivers practical ideas and profitable bottom-line results "with a lot of snap" - so people can grasp it, remember it, and use it. Recognized by *Meetings & Conventions Magazine* as "one of America's most electrifying speakers," Tony's polished style, powerful message, and proven ability as a consummate business strategist consistently earns rave reviews.

Topics

Customer Loyalty

How to Get and Keep Customers...For Life

Turn your customers into business apostles, long-term profitable customers who "preach the gospel" for your company. Dr. Alessandra focuses on how everyone in your organization can become more customer-driven and less operations-driven; how to turn moments of misery into moments of magic; and how to create customer satisfaction, intimacy, and retention. It all starts by finding loyalty-prone prospects, turning them into a first time sale, consistently exceeding their expectations so they become ongoing customers, and ultimately converting them into apostles.

The Platinum Rule

Relationship Strategies for Building Lasting Rapport

Everyone knows the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have done unto you.' But this habit can turn off those who have different needs, wants and hopes than we do. Instead, the real key is to apply the Platinum Rule: 'Do unto others as THEY would like done unto them!' The Platinum Rule is Dr. Tony Alessandra's most requested topic— often described as "a college lecture delivered in the Comedy Store."

Collaborative Selling

How to Gain the Competitive Advantage in Selling

Selling today requires creating long-term customers rather than one-shot sales. It has evolved from a transaction mentality to building relationships; from persuading and telling to problem solving and helping; from low-price selling to value-added selling. In this dynamic program, Tony shows your employees how to use the six-step collaborative selling model to dominate their market.

Rave Reviews

3M – *You were wonderful! You surpassed our highest expectations. And a standing ovation – the audience was unanimous in its raves!*

AT & T – *It is always a pleasure to work with topnotch professionals – simple to arrange, powerful talk and very thorough follow-up.*

Bell Atlantic – *People were talking about your presentation hours after it was over and all day on Friday. Truly an outstanding presentation.*

Bridal Marketing Assn. Of America – *Tony was terrific! My staff swears he's the best ever!*

Caterpillar – *[I've] become an "apostle" of Tony.*

Digital Equipment Corp. – *Outstanding! We expected you to deliver a sales presentation and to create enthusiasm. You over-achieved in both.*

Federal Express – *Everyone and when I say everyone, I mean every person who was present had nothing but positive-very positive remarks about your message and for that crowd, that is excellent!*

IBM – *Your presentation was rated the number "1" session out of 109 electives.*

International Foodservice Distrib. Assn. – *Your talk was the highlight of the convention.*

Johnson & Johnson – *The raves over your presentation...went on for the entire week. I cannot count how many times people told me you were the best speaker they'd ever heard.*

McGraw-Hill – CIG – *Actionable, quick, stimulating and fun. Nobody has combined content and delivery to so excite our folks as you.*

Merrill Lynch – *We all loved your message and it was perfect for the mission ahead of us all.*

Million Dollar Round Table – *Outstanding!*

Parke-Davis – *We needed someone to deliver on a closing motivational speech and Tony exceeded our expectations to a standing ovation.*

Snelling & Snelling – *You left us with a message that can be immediately translated to added dollars to the bottom line.*

Toshiba – *Your presentation was a "Home Run." You truly "exceeded expectations."*

Union Bank of California – *Tony had the audience in the palm of his hand during the entire presentation. He used humor and his engaging personal style to keep them with him, absorbing his message throughout.*

USA Today – *...you were a smash!*

To check availability or request a video demo, contact:

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