

## **Conversations over the Telephone**

### **It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It**

The moment you pick up a telephone, body language and visual perceptions disappear and your tone of voice becomes dominant.

Almost the entire message you project to the customer over the phone is derived from tone of voice and attitude.

For example:

- A flat tone of voice says to the customer, "I don't like my job and would rather be elsewhere."
- Slow pitch and presentation say, "I am sad and lonely – do not bother me."
- A high pitch, rapid voice says, "I am enthusiastic and excited!"
- A loud voice says, "I'm angry and aggressive."

### **Telephone Etiquette**

Telephone etiquette, unlike more varying body language, can be uniform and is not culturally based. The telephone is often the first or last place a customer comes in contact with an organization or company. Being telephone friendly is one of the least expensive and cost effective ways to deliver better customer service.

### **Answering the Telephone**

How a company answers the phone can tell the whole story of how they treat customers and employees. The correct phrase said in the right order in a positive tone leaves a good impression and starts the customer-client relationship off on the right foot.

Pick up the phone in three rings. More than three rings signals chaos in your office or inattentiveness on the part of your company or organization.

Greet the caller, e.g. "hello", "good morning". Good manners show you respect the caller.

Give your name, e.g., "Hi, my name is Emma". This is a courtesy that serves to personalize the customer service experience as well as allowing the customer to hold you accountable for your

level of service. He/she now has a point of reference and someone to contact when he/she calls back.

Ask the customer if or how you can help. Asking to help tells the customer you are there to serve his/her needs and to solve his/her problems. This also leaves the customer with a positive impression.

Put it altogether and you have a good example:

“Good morning, thanks for calling the Insect Farming and Trading Agency, my name is Emma, how may I help you?”

The greeting is key, it sets the tone and style of the whole interaction.

## **Troubleshooting**

Some things which may upset a customer are simply unavoidable. Here are some tips on how to best handle these situations.

### **“Putting a Customer on Hold”**

Ask the customer if you can put them on hold; wait for them to say “yes” or “no” and then explain it will only be for a short period of time. Explain to customers why you are putting them on hold.

Thank customers for holding.

### **“Transferring a Call”**

Ask the customer if they mind being transferred; wait for them to say “yes” or “no” and explain why they are being transferred and to whom.

### **“Taking a Message**

” Explain your co-workers absence in a positive light but do not be too specific. Explain that your co-worker is in a meeting, conference, briefing, or training. Do not say he or she is gravely ill, is too hung over to come to work, never called in today, can’t be found, that you do not know where he or she is, or that he or she “was just here”.

Give a reasonable estimate of when the co-worker will return.

Offer to help the caller, take a message or transfer to another staff member.

If a co-worker is on holiday and will not return to the office for some time, it is permissible to say that he or she is on holiday. However, avoid details such as, “Raymond is at the beach and I am sure he is having a great time.” While such details may seem innocuous and even humorous, they give the wrong impression to those seeking service.

### **“Ending the Call”**

This is the final step in good telephone etiquette. A good customer service representative ends the call on a positive note, repeating any actions agreed to be taken and what is going to be done to help or serve the customer.

### **Respond to your business email quickly!**

Answering your business email promptly should be a priority for all business. Not only is email an important communication line with your customers, it is often used by them to gauge that your trustworthy.

If a customer sends you an e-mail with a simple question, and you take forever to answer it, what does that say about the rest of your operation? It's one of the tell-tale signs customers use to separate men from boys. And we all want to play with the big guys, don't we?

Talking about the big businesses, surveys show that the Top-500 fail miserably at answering their business email. Jupiter Communications reported that 42% took more than 5 days to answer a simple question. In the world of Internet, that might as well have been forever. If a customer has to

wait that long for an answer, most likely she will have taken their business elsewhere. 35% of companies don't even bother to answer at all. I guess, they just don't like customers ;-) Forrester Research is reporting figures that are similar.

### **So what is prompt answering your business email?**

Business email should be answered within 24 hours max. No exceptions. At that rate, you're doing a lot better than a lot of other businesses.

If you really want your customer service to shine, you should consider answering your business email twice a day with a 12 hour interval.

It is even better to check out your direct competition by sending them an e-mail as if you are a potential customer. Send them more than one on several days. Especially check out Mondays, Fridays and weekends. Track the time it's taking them to answer, and implement a procedure to beat them at the business email game.

OK, I understand that for small businesses, resources are limited. But your stream of business email is most likely to be a lot less than for big guns. And if you check and answer e-mail regularly, numbers of e-mails to answer are usually very easy to handle.

## **First Impressions – You Only Get One**

### **Making a Good First Impression**

Every salesperson in every business knows the importance of making a positive first impression. Sales people know their success and livelihood will depend on how their potential customer perceives them in the first 30 seconds of interaction. Good salespeople develop an almost instantaneous rapport with potential customers. Customers like them, follow their advice and then buy their product.

The reality is that we prefer doing business with those we like and trust. Impressions are the key to developing trust and confidence in the customer.

As the old saying goes, "You will never get a second chance to make a first impression." This is why the first impression is extremely important and can set the tone for all future transactions.

Here are some ways of creating positive impressions, some of which have already been discussed:

- Thoughtfulness in meeting the customer's needs
- Personal responsibility for a customer
- Quick problem solving for customer
- Offering immediate assistance
- Friendliness
- Using customer's name in a conversation
- Pleasant voice tone
- Polite and courteous manners
- Neatness
- A genuine smile

Here are some factors that create a negative impression:

- Making the customer wait
- Not answering the phone promptly
- Not saying "please" and/or "thank you"
- Speaking loudly or condescendingly to customers or colleagues
- Making faces, frowning, acting distant, not smiling
- Looking disheveled or like you do not care about your appearance
- A poor handshake
- Focusing on another task while addressing or servicing a customer.

Remember, impressions stay with those you meet, especially customers, and once registered; negative impressions are difficult to overcome.

## **Ten Major Do's and Don'ts of Customer Service**

Every day customer service representatives face situations when what they say makes or breaks a service interaction. Below are ten phrases that should never be used because they frustrate and anger customers.

- “No.”
- “I don’t know.”
- “That’s not my job./That’s not my department.”
- “You are right – that is bad”
- “Calm down.”
- “I’m busy right now.”
- “Call me back.”
- “That’s not my fault.”
- “You need to talk to my supervisor.”
- “You want it by when?”

**No:** Everyone hates the word “no”. It is de -motivating, discouraging, and disinteresting. You will hear this word throughout your life as a customer and as a service provider. “No” is tantamount to “bad service.” “No” is easy, cheap, unproductive and negative – it means failure. Unfortunately, “no” is the word we most often hear when a new idea, request or concept is introduced. Admittedly, there are times when you will have to say “no,” but focus on what you can do for the customer (accentuate the positive) and not the negatives of the situation. Better to say “What I can do is...” and demonstrate that you care and want to provide quality service despite your current limitations.

**I don't know:** Good service means never saying, "I don't know." When a customer hears "I don't know," they hear, "I don't feel like finding the information you need." Better to say, "I'll find out" or "Let me look into this and get back to you ASAP."

**That's not my job./That's not my department:** When a customer asks you to do something that you do not know how to do or do not have the authority to do, become a catalyst by leading the customer to the person or department who can help him/her solve the problem. Better to say, "Let me transfer to the person who can immediately help you with this problem."

**You're right – that is bad:** Many inexperienced customer service representatives think by sympathizing with the customer's plight, he/she will win over the customer rather than actually doing something to solve the customer's problem. If a customer expresses annoyance or frustration, do not make it worse by commiserating with him/her. Empathize with the customer but seek to solve the problem.

Likewise, it does not do your company or organization any good to criticize co-workers or other departments within the company or to the customers. All interested parties end up looking unprofessional and inept. Rather try your best to accommodate the customer. Do not promise anything you cannot deliver but do try to serve the customer well. Better to say, "I understand your frustration, let's see how we can solve this problem."

**Calm down:** When customers are upset or angry let them vent (within reason) and they will eventually calm down. Telling them to "calm down" is belittling, and often serves only to infuriate them further. Better to say, "I'm sorry." This is one of the ideal phrases for customer service – it helps to placate the angriest of customers and allows you to begin the process of solving a customer complaint or request and "meet him/her half way."

Apologizing does not mean you agree with the customer but it is a means to empathize and move beyond the emotion of the moment and negative impact.

**I'm busy right now:** It is not easy to juggle customers. You are often helping one customer when another calls or visits your service area. Asking a customer to be patient or politely asking them to wait is very different than putting them off and saying you are too busy to help. Leaving them standing there or on hold are two of the mortal sins of customer service.

“Being too busy” is tantamount to saying that you do not care and they are not important. Let the customer know they are important and you are aware of their presence. Better to say, “I’ll be with you in one moment” or “Please hold and I’ll be right with you.”

**Call me back:** This expression conveys little interest on the part of the customer relation’s employee for the needs and wants of the customer. You should always call the customer back because you want their business and are responsive to their requests. Being proactive is part of good customer service.

**That’s not my fault:** If an angry customer accuses you of creating a problem, rightly or wrongly, the natural reaction is to defend oneself. However, this is not the best course of action. The customer has a problem that needs to be solved. By resisting the need to defend yourself, and focusing on the needs of the customer, you can resolve the problem faster and with less stress and confrontation. Better to say, “Let’s see what we can do about this problem.”

**You Need to Talk to My Supervisor:** This cliché of bad customer service has angered and frustrated customers’ decades. Customers often ask for things outside the scope of your work or authority – maybe even outside the services/products provided by your company. While passing off these requests to your manager is a tempting option, it is better if you attempt to solve the problem yourself or directly go to the supervisor yourself and get a solution. You become a service hero for the customer and the supervisor. Better to say, “Let me find that out for you.”

**You Want it by When?:** Customers often make unrealistic demands, especially when it comes to time. Your first reaction may be annoyance and you may want to make a snide or sarcastic comment. However, the best approach is to hold off on displaying a negative attitude and making a poor impression. Better to say, “I will call you right back after I find out if that is feasible.”

## Helpful Reminders for Polite and Friendly Responses

Wrong Approach	Polite and Friendly Alternative
I don’t Know	I’ll find out



No	What I can do is..
That is not my Job	Let me find the right person who can help you.
You are right-this is Bad	I understand your frustrations
That is not my fault	Let's see what we can do about this
You want it by when?	I will try my best
Calm down	I am sorry
I m busy right now	I will be with in just a moment
Call me back	I will call you back, what is your telephone number?

## **Practice what you preach - Dealing with the customer**

### **Communicating with the Unsatisfied Customer**

How many times have you as a customer run into the problem of excuses. There is a problem and the sales person, technician or customer service representative is making lame excuses, namely:

- It is the fault of the computer.
- It is the fault of the other sales clerk.
- It is the fault of the chief of the department.
- It is the fault of the system. • It is the fault of the Government.
- It is just the way it is.

Sometimes it feels as if nothing is anybody's fault or is in anybody's department. This is poor customer service. Good customer service means accountability, responsibility and taking action to satisfy the customer.

Having discussed the importance of knowing how the customer feels and WHAT NOT TO SAY, let's address the notion of how to communicate with an unsatisfied customer.

If your customer is unsatisfied (for just or unjust reasons), you will have to use some of the many techniques of the customer service professional to win their support and continued loyalty. When coming into contact with a customer, communicating with him/her, or analyzing problems, do not forget to use the following methods or qualities of the customer service professional:

**Listen:** It is of primary importance when dealing with an unsatisfied or complaining customer to listen attentively to his/her complaint, gripe, frustration or grievance. Be patient, attentive, and friendly.

**Express you are sorry:** ‘

We are sorry for this mistake/problem.” “We are terribly sorry for this inconvenience.” “How can we work to solve this problem together?” “I can imagine how frustrated you are.”

**Do not argue and do not interrupt:** This will only worsen the situation, especially if the customer is angry. Let him speak before you try to discuss with him what has happened.

**Do not lose your self-control:** If you stay relaxed, customers will calm down.

**Point out facts:** Listen carefully – and write everything down. Do not make any comments until the customer is finished talking.

**Admit the problem:** If you can suggest a solution, do it. If not tell the customer what actions you will take and what actions will follow. Never make the mistake of promising something you are not able to do.

**Involve the customer in problem solving:** Suggest the customer alternative solutions, if they exist. Customers appreciate the opportunity to choose the ways of problem solving.

**Follow-up:** Make sure that the promised measures are taken. If you do not fulfill what was promised and ignore the customer's complaint, the problem will grow. Next time it will be more difficult to solve.

**Give the customer a "way back":** Sometimes customers are wrong. You should let them leave with dignity, without feeling embarrassed.

**Do not question the customer's correctness:** From the very beginning you should believe that the customer may be right. Always be open minded toward the customer's opinion, make them feel they deserve to be listened to.

## **Solving the Customer's Problems**

When you listen to the customer's complaint you take responsibility to solve the problem.

- Listen without interruption and with full attention.
- Behave without aggression, and without arguing.
- Do not extend excuses for the problem, and thank the customer for drawing their attention to it and helping solve it.
- Express sympathy and full understanding.

## **Customer Service Problem Solving Involves:**

- Ask necessary questions to get more complete information and completed picture of a situation
- Find out exactly what the customer needs you to do for them
- Explain first what you can do, and then gently add what you cannot do
- Discuss in detail all opinions, and then decide what needs to be done
- Undertake immediately what was discussed

- Check the result to make sure the customer is completely satisfied

## **Follow -Up with the Customer**

### **It pays to please**

We like companies that treat us well, and some people will even pay more to obtain this.

Here are some recent statistics that prove the point:

- People spend up to 10 percent more for the same product with better service
- When people receive good service, on average, they tell 11 people
- When people receive poor service, on average, they tell up to 20 people
- There is an 80 percent chance that customers will repurchase from a company if their complaint is handled quickly and pleasantly
- If the service is really poor, 90 percent of customers won't come back

It is extremely important to make sure that all customer service measures that were discussed or promised are in fact taken. It is not enough for the customer to experience a satisfactory telephone or face-to-face interaction. If nothing comes of the contact they will be even more frustrated and unhappy. Make sure you do whatever you have promised in a timely manner.

### **Initiative**

Initiative is the difference between adequate customer service and customer service that wins you a customer for life.

Everyday examples of exceptional customer service:

- Taxi driver who opens the door for you or waits at night for you to safely get into your destination.
- Computer technician who does computer work and then calls back a week later to make sure your IT is functioning well.

- Car salesperson that calls a month after you buy a car to make sure it is running well.
- The petrol station attendant who washes your window or checks your oil.
- The electric company who calls and checks to make sure your service is working well and apologizes for any “brown outs” or “black outs.”

None of these customer service people HAD to make this extra effort or go to this trouble. These “goodwill initiatives” are beyond the call of duty and make the customer beyond satisfied. They make the customer remember the transaction or occasion.

### **Customer service traits to Note**

- Be on time, open on time, deliver on time
- Follow through and deliver your promises
- Go the extra kilometer for customers
- Offer you customer options
- Express empathy to upset customers
- Treat customers as the MOST important part of your job
- Treat co-workers as if they are customers
- Give customers your name and contact details

### **Benefits of good customer service**

#### **Beneficiary Benefit**

- **Providers**

Higher income (more sales, repeat business, referred business)

Recognition Personal satisfaction & fulfilment

Less stress

Higher self-awareness and self-control

Greater authenticity Happier life at work

Happier life outside work

- **Organizations**

Lower employee turnover

Fewer complaints

Higher productivity

Better work environment

Higher inventory turnover

Higher profits

## **Service Leaders**

Customer service leaders rarely understand how their actions, tone, and attitude affect the performance and success of their staff. As a leader, the first step to motivating your staff is to demonstrate the customer service qualities you want them emulate.

There are a number of factors to take into account as you seek to build a successful customer service unit:

- Greet your staff in the morning. Start out the day with a positive attitude.
- Discuss your feelings. Don't vent in front employees, but remain calm. If there is a problem, it's important to discuss it in an appropriate manner.
- Do the right thing. When faced with a difficult customer, follow correct customer practices. In other words, practice what you preach.

- Support your staff 's decisions. As a leader, customers often ask to speak to you when they're upset, thinking you'll overturn your employee's decisions. While this may be necessary at times, often the employee was correct. It's important to build morale by sticking up for your employees
- .Empower reps to provide great service. In addition to supporting their decisions, encourage autonomy. They ultimately need to feel assured that they are trusted and have the appropriate power to solve a problem.
- Learn from others. Managers do not have all the customer service answers; there is nothing worse than a "know-it-all" manager. There are opportunities for learning and coaching everyday.
- Listen to employee needs. A good leader should listen to employees and take their ideas, opinions, and input into account.
- Socialize: Get to know your staff, their personal lives, and what is important to them. Take the time to celebrate achievements and special occasions to boost employee engagement and team morale.
- Use good telephone etiquette: Be your staff 's best example of manners and friendly interactions. Say "thank you." Be generous with compliments and praise your staff their efforts. Thank them for a job well done and foster an environment of recognition.

## Conclusion

## And the reward is...

- You get to meet new people in a customer service job setting.
- The positive response you get from customers will give you confidence.
- It's something to be proud of It's fun to care about doing your best It will make your workplace a positive place to be at.
- You give the customer value for his money
- Some positions receive tips from customers (extra money to take home with you at the end of the day)
- You impress your boss and show that you are an asset to the company
- Sometimes you can make an impression that will affect you in the future such as new opportunities and/or career advancement.
- You set an example for your co-workers, and are admired for your efforts.
- You help create high standards for the company.
- you contribute to an overall memorable experience for the customer
- You help give the company, the community and the territory a good reputation for customer service.

Your success is built on how well you deliver!