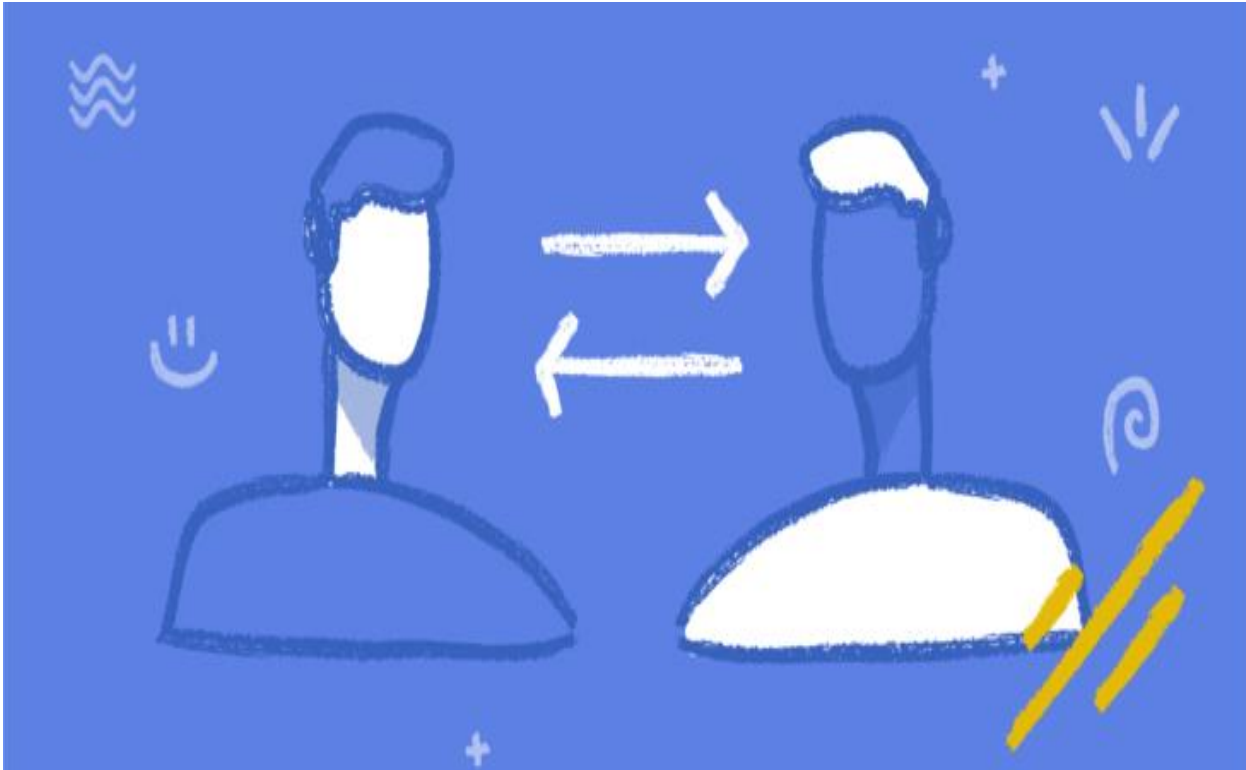


15 Customer Service Skills & How to Improve Each One (Step-by-Step)



BY ERIKA TRUJILLO

Amidst day-to-day struggles, we forget great support stems not from a mysterious alchemy of magnetism and magic.

Instead, it arises from a certain set of core competencies.

Behind the scenes of every experience are attainable skills that separate average or frustrating from truly exceptional.

Fair warning: This article is *long*. (Which is fitting for a topic so central to successful support.)

To make it easier to apply, we've put together one-pagers on every skill that includes short definitions and five steps to bring them to life.

15 Customer Service Skills & How to Improve Each One (Step-by-Step)

Empathy



The capacity to experience other people's thoughts and feelings from their point of view, rather than our own. To identify with or be sensitivity toward.

1. Spend time with people who are different.
2. Get a set of Questions and Empathy cards.
3. Join an acting or improv class.
4. Test your emotional intelligence (EQ).
5. Recommended resource: Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind*.

But what skills matter? And how do you take your team, business, or career to the next level? To answer those questions...

Here are 15 customer service skills along with step-by-step instructions on how to improve each one:

1. Develop empathy as your cornerstone

The capacity to experience other people's thoughts and feelings *from* their point of view, rather than our own. To identify with or be sensitivity toward.

Empathy is the foundation of support. That's because it's the foundation of all relationships.

Thankfully, empathy isn't something you're born either with *or without*. It can be learned from a young age or improved as you get older.

Although we may not have experienced what a person is going through, empathy allows us to understand their emotional reaction to a particular situation.

As customer service agents, we're often so focused on what we're going to say next we miss the opportunity to listen and be present. This is a common scenario, particularly someone's having a negative customer experience.

Above all, people want to feel understood, respected, and supported.

Steps to develop empathy

1. Spend time with people who are different.

Exposing ourselves to opposing viewpoints supercharges empathy. As long as our aim is to understand and *not disagree*. Try sending an email to a friend with opposing politics. Or, connect with someone on a separate team at work.

Wondering how to kick off those conversations?

2. Get a set of [Questions and Empathy](#) cards.

Created in conjunction with Sub Rosa's popular *Applied Empathy* series, each card contains a thought-provoking question to spark meaningful conversations. These are fantastic for team building; even better for jumping into step one.

3. Join an acting or improv class.

No job in the world calls on you to step into someone else's shoes more than acting. Taking a beginner's class at a community center or community college is a great way to learn how to do that.

4. Test your emotional intelligence (EQ).

The Greater Good Science Center at U.C. Berkeley has developed [a short online quiz](#) to measure how well you read other people's emotions through facial expressions. (It's harder than you probably think.)

5. Recommended resource: Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind*.

"Empathy is about standing in someone else's shoes, feeling with his or her heart, seeing with his or her eyes. Not only is empathy hard to outsource and automate, but it makes the world a better place."

Empathy



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2. Exude positivity by watching your words

A deliberately optimistic state of mind; looking for *what's right*, rather than what's wrong—and aligning our words with that goal.

It's a universal truth that we can't change how we feel. Not directly anyway. Telling someone, "Just be happy," is about as effective as telling them, "Just grow six inches."

Neither can be accomplished by an act of the will.

So, how do you become more positive? By making a conscious choice to replace negative words with positive words: both verbally and mentally.

Positivity doesn't so much refer to your outlook on life, but instead to the language you use.

To understand the power of positive language, think about the *negative* language nobody likes hearing and what kind of reactions these might provoke:

- "It's against policy to provide that for you."
- "That's not our fault. It's yours."
- "You can't do that."
- "Calm down."
- "No."

Steps to practice positivity

6. Make a list of negative phrases in customer support.
Start with the short list above. Grab the five [customer service phrases you should avoid at all costs here](#). Or, even better, write out your own versions of love-to-hate responses and replies.
7. Brainstorm positive ways to reframe them.
From: “I don’t know.” To: “I’ll talk to the right team member and get back to you ASAP.” From: “Please calm down.” To: “I’m sorry. I understand. I’d be frustrated, too. Here’s what should help.”
8. Rewrite your frequently sent replies.
Run through the email templates, direct messages, and FAQs from your knowledge base. Identify negative language paying special attention to your list as well as the dreaded word “but.” Then, rewrite them.
9. Listen to your own thoughts.
More formative than what we say to others is what we say to ourselves. Everyone has a unique set of negative self-talk scripts on repeat. Especially when we get stressed. Unearth your own. Then, catch and replace.
10. Recommended resource: Martin E.P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*.
“What is crucial is what you think when you fail, using the power of ‘non-negative thinking.’ Changing the destructive things you say to yourself when you experience the setbacks that life deals all of us is the central skill of optimism.”

Positivity

A deliberately optimistic state of mind; looking for what's right, rather than what's wrong—and aligning our words with that goal.

1. Make a list of negative phrases in customer support.
2. Brainstorm positive ways to reframe them.
3. Rewrite your frequently sent replies.
4. Listen to your own thoughts.
5. Recommended resource: Martin E.P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*.



3. Practice patience by knowing your triggers

To accept or tolerate delays, complaints, or suffering without developing counter-productive responses such as anger or irritation.

Customer service is not an easy job. Sometimes, customers will be angry with you. Sometimes, they'll need extra attention to understand what seems obvious. And sometimes, they'll lash out.

No matter the issue, the worst thing you can do in any of these situations is to lose your cool.

Patience not only helps you deliver better service, but a [study](#) from the University of Toronto found that being impatient impedes our ability to enjoy life *and* makes us worse at doing hard things.

A number of additional [studies](#) have also shown that people who are patient tend to be more healthy, happy, and successful.

How to improve patience


11. Understand the addictive nature of anger, irritation, and outrage.

The more you feel these emotions, the more likely you are to keep feeling them. Impatience breeds impatience. On top of that, it also reinforces the very emotional states that prevent us from being helpful.

12. Upgrade your attitude towards discomfort and pain.
When you feel your patience wearing thin, remind yourself, “This is merely uncomfortable, not intolerable.” *This too shall pass*. Moreover, suffering is life’s greatest opportunity to learn. Embrace it.
13. Pay attention to when the irritation starts.
Find the external triggers that press your buttons. Make a list of your usual (impatience) suspects. Internally, watch out for body language like clenched teeth or balled fists. That way, you can correct course before it’s too late.
14. Control your self-talk.
Much like positivity, the things we say to ourselves have an uncanny ability to come true, whether they’re positive or negative.
15. Recommended resource: Jane Bolton, [Psychology Today](#).
“Most people who are patience ‘professionals’ recommend that we train ourselves to work with little pains and irritations so that when the big ones come, we will have developed the patience we need for adversity.”

Patience

To accept or tolerate delays, complaints, or suffering without developing counter-productive responses such as anger or irritation.

1. Understand the addictive nature of anger, irritation, and outrage.
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 3. Pay attention to when the irritation starts.
 4. Control your self-talk.
 5. Recommended resource: Jane Bolton, *Psychology Today*.
- 

4. Aim for clarity before persuasion

Easy to understand. The elimination of ambiguity when communicating. Hinging on clarity is persuasiveness—people need to understand before they can be convinced.

Clarity isn't just important for making your customer feel confident and empowered—it can also make a big impact on your bottom line.

What if you could send one less email per support interaction because you didn't have to clarify anything that your customer didn't understand the first time?

If you field 300 requests a week (on the low side of an average Groove customer), that's 15,600 fewer emails sent in a year.

Think that estimate is too high? Even if you could send 0.25 fewer emails, on average—a very reasonable expectation—you'd still send 3,900 fewer emails per year.

That's not insignificant, and it's a great argument for mastering crystal-clear communication skills.

The secret ingredient is *structure*...

How to achieve clarity

16. Define technical terms.

Don't be afraid of using technical terms when they're necessary. Do include plain-language definitions. In fact, consider making a cheat sheet of 10-15 difficult words central to your product or service.

17. Never assume "they read it."

This isn't about someone reading your email or chat response. Rather, it's about thinking that—just because you covered it in your onboarding process or on your knowledge base—*they already understand*.

18. Put the most important information first.

If there's something a user absolutely needs to know before they get into the process of taking action, make it the first thing they see. (This goes right back to either adding links to terms in number one or explaining them.)

19. Write in chronological order.

Ensure the order of steps in the support process makes sense. A great exercise is to write down the instructions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Then, have a co-worker follow them. It's amazing how much we leave out.

20. Recommended resource: Ann Handley, *Everybody Writes*.

"Our brains crave order—structure, patterns, parallelism. Your job as a

writer is to create that order. The clearer the writer is, the more secure a reader feels.”

Clarity



Easy to understand. The elimination of ambiguity when communicating. Hinging on clarity is persuasiveness—people need to understand before they can be convinced.

1. Define technical terms.
2. Never assume “they read it.”
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5. Recommended resource: Ann Handley, *Everybody Writes*.

5. Keep it simple, stupid

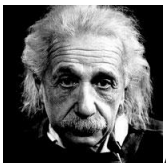
The quality of being *uncomplicated*. Plainness of speech. Unadorned and single-minded purpose that makes comprehension effortless.

If clarity is about order and structure, simplicity lives or dies by one rule: *less is more*. Less jargon. Smaller words. Shorter sentences. Fewer ideas.

Keeping things simple *without*—distorting what needs to be done—empowers customer. It removes the barriers of doubt and confusion, placing them securely in the driver’s seat.

Complexity, on the other hand, quickly leads to confusion, impatience, and other negative emotions that become counterproductive to resolving the original query.

“If you can’t explain it to a child, you don’t understand it yourself.”



Albert Einstein

Taking inspiration from that line, Reddit's [Explain Like I'm Five](#) distills complex topics into plain language. Here's one of my favorites:

"Email is like a written letter that arrives in seconds instead of days. Google is a company that runs many websites, the biggest of which is a search engine. A search engine is a phone book for other websites."

How to hone simplicity

21. Beware "the curse of knowledge."

The more we know about a subject, the harder it becomes to teach it.

Psychologists call this the curse of knowledge: a cognitive bias that assumes other people have the necessary background to understand what we do.

22. Record your a-ha moments.

To combat the curse of knowledge, take note of your own breakthrough moments. Writing down your experiences from *not knowing to knowing* captures as they occur so you can lead others down the same path.

23. Ask, "What can I remove?"

Before hitting send on a support message, the final step should always be to mercilessly critique it looking for anything to exclude. Likewise, look for opportunities to simplify from paragraphs to sentences to phrases to words.

24. Have one goal.

You may need to explain multiple ideas and include multiple steps to address someone's need. But every time you communicate—whether via email, chat, or phone—limit yourself to one goal: one outcome at a time.

25. Recommended resource: William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*.

"The writer must constantly ask himself: What am I trying to say? Surprisingly often, he doesn't know. Then he must look at what he has written and ask: Have I said it? Is it clear to someone encountering the subject for the first time?"

Simplicity

The quality of being uncomplicated. Plainness of speech. Unadorned and single-minded purpose that makes comprehension effortless.

1. Beware “the curse of knowledge.”
2. Record your a-ha moments.
3. Ask, “What can I remove?”
4. Have one goal.
5. Recommended resource: William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*.

6. Cultivate curiosity through questions

Having a strong desire to venture into the unknown with the intention of learning or discovering something new. To be inquisitive and to question.

When we’re young, we are innately curious. Our minds are full of questions. But as we get older, it’s more common to accept the way things are and lose our sense of wonder.

Curiosity is a skill we must learn to embrace in customer service. Why?

Because curious people ask better questions, unlock deeper insights, and solve more complex problems.

Questioning, investigating, and learning: curiosity leads us to the answers we need to build better customer relationships and find out the deeper causes of problems. [Research](#) from Harvard Business Review found that curiosity is vital to an organization’s performance.

What’s more, curiosity makes us less defensive and less aggressive in stressful situations.

How to feed your curiosity

26. Ask more questions.

Regardless of how much information someone shares, it’s critical dig deeper

to draw out better insights. Also, keep asking “why.” Be curious about *why* things are done a particular way or *why* your customer is feeling how they are.

27. Inquire, but don’t interrogate.

There’s a fine line between seeking to understand and *grilling a customer*. Normally, this comes down to our own internal state of mind. Questions cannot be a veiled attempt to prove someone wrong.

28. Focus more on the problem.

We’re often so focused on solving problems that we don’t take the time to unearth how the problem occurred in the first place. When you venture into unfamiliar territory, look for the root cause.

29. Go off-script if you need to.

Speaking of unfamiliar territory, no one likes the unknown; but that’s where you’ll discover the true benefits of curiosity—untapped insights. Approach the unknown like a reporter, explorer, or scientist: your only goal is discovery.

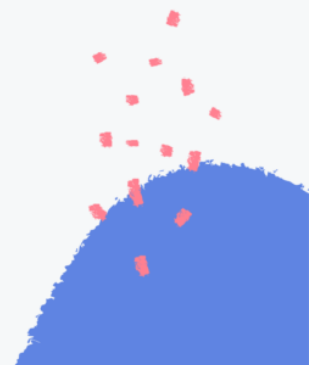
30. Recommended resource: Amy Singh, [TEDx Talk](#).

“So, my challenge for you is to pursue your curiosity. And when those difficult barriers come up, dig deep inside yourself and see if you can find that little child’s voice—the one that grows silent as we age, and let it inspire you.”

Curiosity

Having a strong desire to venture into the unknown with the intention of learning or discovering something new. To be inquisitive and to question.

1. Ask more questions.
2. Inquire, but don’t interrogate.
3. Focus more on the problem.
4. Go off-script if you need to.
5. Recommended resource: Amy Singh, TEDx Talk.



7. Listen attentively and actively

Listening actively and paying close attention to what is being said or done. To be alert, watchful, and receptive.

The body language of attentiveness means holding eye contact in person or eliminating distractions digitally. It involves honing our listening skills, devoting ourselves to the issue at hand, and responding with the right questions or answers.

If you're in a bustling call center or an open-plan office with music and other conversations going on around you, attentiveness can be a challenge.

Inattention, however, leads to disgruntled customers, which can intensify already touchy situations and take longer to resolve.

Being attentive allows you to take care of customers' *actual* needs, rather than what they *think* they need—often two very different things. It's up to you to help them realise that.

"In our louder and louder world," explains sound expert, Julian Treasure, "we are losing our listening."

How to be more attentive

31. Immerse yourself in silence.

Take three-to-ten minutes each day to reset your ears and recalibrate your mind. This habit works well at the start of the day and can be a godsend amidst busy seasons. If you can't get absolute silence, then find a quiet space to ...

32. Enjoy the mundane.

Savor the everyday sounds around you: a coffee machine, dryer, or the keyboard when you type. You'll find that even the most everyday sounds can be interesting. (Julian calls it "the hidden choir.")

33. Do *one thing*.

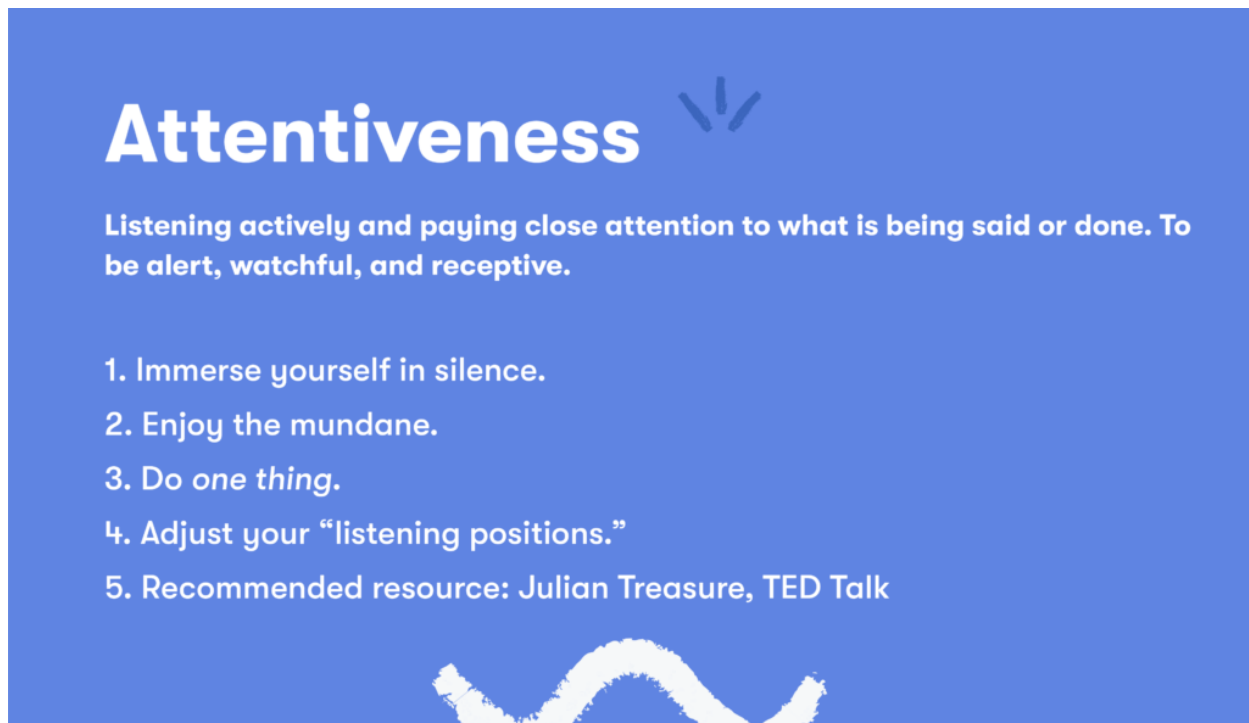
Multitasking is a myth. When we multitask, what we're really doing is "task switching," which eats up brainpower. Discipline yourself to focus on the customer, the whole customer, and *nothing but the customer*.

34. Adjust your "listening positions."

This is about mental posture. For example, try listening to a podcast from a

critical perspective, validating each statement. Then listen again from an empathetic perspective where you focus just on emotions.

35. Recommended resource: Julian Treasure, [TED Talk](#)
“RASA stands for ‘Receive,’ which means pay attention to the person; ‘Appreciate,’ making little noises like ‘hmm,’ ‘oh,’ OK’; ‘Summarize’—the word ‘so’ is very important in communication; and ‘Ask,’ ask questions afterwards.”



8. Learn to prioritize, then automate

The action or process of ordering competing demands; managing both time and expectations more effectively. Putting first things first.

When a customer reaches out, they expect a timely response. When multiple customers are demanding your attention all at the same time, those individual expectations don't change in the slightest.

Responding to all inquiries at once is physically impossible—unless they've all asked common questions. In those instances, [automation](#), [email templates](#), and a searchable [knowledge base](#) can be godsend.

If only it were always that simple...

Without effectively managing your time and prioritizing tasks, you can easily become flustered, resentful, and frustrated.

It also can compromise a sale if you leave new customers waiting too long for a response.

How to better prioritize

36. Create a triage system.

Does your business have a system in place that helps you decide which inquiries need urgent attention? Are you all on the same page as to what should fall in order of importance? If not, create a plan now *before the storm hits*.

37. Consider the impact or consequences of the situation.

Are there direct and time-sensitive consequences if the issue isn't resolved? Are those consequences monetary? Or, is the customer simply more demanding than someone with real stakes on the line?

38. Know when it's time to move on.

If you're spending too much time with a customer, this can also be detrimental. Learn how to wrap up the conversation and summarize the next steps. (Check out the skill on Closure for more.)

39. Don't work harder than you need to.

There will also be times where you simply do not know how to help. It's okay to recognize your limitations. Instead of running down rabbit holes—or chasing your own tail—connect the customer with the right person.

40. Recommended resource: Charles Hummel, [*Tyranny of the Urgent*](#).

"There is a regular tension between things that are urgent and things that are important—and far too often, the urgent wins."

Prioritization



The action or process of ordering competing demands; managing both time and expectations more effectively. Putting first things first.

1. Create a triage system.
2. Consider the impact or consequences of the situation.
3. Know when it's time to move on.
4. Don't work harder than you need to.
5. Recommended resource: Charles Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent*.

9. Keep your composure

Remaining calm when faced with adversity and staying in control of your emotions when the unexpected happens.

Some customers can make it tough to hold your composure, but the moment you lose your cool is the same moment you lose your ability to be helpful.

(Easier said than done.)

Why? Because we're human. We feel deeply.

On top of the daily stress of serving customers, you could be facing something personal. Maybe you just had a bad start to the day. And, of course, the same might be true to the customer who's frustrated on the other end of the conversation.

But as soon as your actions are hijacked by emotions in a tense customer scenario, productivity ceases. You end up with a moral dilemma because you snapped in the heat of the moment.

How to maintain composure

41. Breathe.

While the other person is speaking—or before responding in writing—take

time to breathe. Slowly and deliberately. Measured breaths calm the body, lower blood pressure, and force oxygen back into the brain.

42. Watch out for HALT.

HALT stands for hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. Given that it's impossible to separate external stress from the customer in front of us, stay vigilant over these physical and emotional states.

43. Don't fall for the fundamental attribution error (FAE).

The FAE is our natural tendency to explain someone's actions based on their personality and underestimate the influence of situational factors. From: "They're a jerk." To: "What might be going on in their life, I can't see?"

44. Delay the conversation or your response.

Lost composure happens. That's fine, as long as you're willing to step away. Is there someone that can jump in for you? Can you reschedule the conversation? Never feel like calling a timeout is a sign of weakness. It's strength.

45. Recommended resource: Robert I. Sutton, *The Asshole Survival Guide*.

"A supervisor instructed me, 'If you talk softer and softer and softer, they're going to have to stop to listen or they're not going to hear anything you're saying. The louder you get, the louder they get. And if you start to tone it down, they start to tone it down.'"

Composure

Remaining calm when faced with adversity and staying in control of your emotions when the unexpected happens.

1. Breathe.

2. Watch out for HALT.

3. Don't fall for the fundamental attribution error (FAE).

4. Delay the conversation or your response.

5. Recommended resource: Robert I. Sutton, *The Asshole Survival Guide*.



10. Thicken your skin

Receiving tough feedback or criticism and not allowing yourself to get upset or offended by it. Being tough, stalwart, or resilient.

Having thick skin doesn't come naturally to everyone. But if you've been in the customer support trenches, you already know how valuable it is.

There will always be someone who disagrees, calls you a bad name, yells at you, or embarrasses you.

No one *enjoys* these experiences—but we can all learn to deal with them.

We tend to take things personally, even when it has absolutely nothing to do with us. If you're dealing with a disgruntled customer, they may lash out. Remind yourself that it's not you they have an issue with, it's the situation.

How to develop thick skin

46. Don't take things personally.

Again, easier said than done. Let your ego rest and reframe the person's bad behavior around the fact that it's not about you. (Oh, and because we know this is so tricky, humility is going to be our next skill.)

47. Know your personal emotional cues.

Be self-aware when you're letting others get to you and learn how to regulate your reactive emotions using breathing techniques, taking a break, and healthy self-care habits outside of work.

48. Don't run away from confrontation.

At the same time, challenge yourself to be direct and discuss the issue further using a calm tone of voice and staying as objective (logical) as possible. Naturally, this is a balancing act with calling a timeout.

49. Think about others.

Instead of getting caught up in your own ball of emotions and taking pity on yourself, recognize how the other person is feeling and focus on that. With this, we're right back to empathy as the foundation.

50. Recommended resource: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*.

"When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly. They are like this because they can't tell good from evil."

Thick skin

Receiving tough feedback or criticism and not allowing yourself to get upset or offended by it. Being tough, stalwart, or resilient.

1. Don't take things personally.
2. Know your personal emotional cues.
3. Don't run away from confrontation.
4. Think about others.
5. Recommended resource: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*.

11. Hone your humility

The ability to put your ego, wants, or needs aside to serve others. Willingness to admit when you're wrong or don't have the answer.

All of us crave approval. To greater or lesser degrees, we find our self-worth in the eyes of other people. Pride is the natural human impulse to protect our reputation: to *look good*.

Ironically, pride manifests itself in two opposite responses: (1) defending ourselves and (2) doubting ourselves. The first is about self-centeredness. The second, self-pity. But the root of each is the same.

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.”

C.S. Lewis

In customer service, pride rears its head through a relentless pursuit of solving problems all on our lonesome. The truth is you don't have to have all the answers. Humility allows us to be comfortable with what we don't know and to be proactive about it.

For many of us, humility is one of the hardest traits to develop, because it has to start from a recognition that you are not always right and requires an acceptance of yourself which many of us find challenging.

How to develop humility

51. Use the first-person *plural* when describing solutions.
Not to make this a ninth-grade English lesson but pronouns matter. When telling a customer how to solve a problem, use “we” as much as possible. This puts you, your team, and the customer in the same boat.
52. Use the first-person *singular* when describing mistakes.
When something goes wrong, the opposite ought to be employed. As you take responsibility, use “I.” “We” or “it”—if referring to a product or service—sometimes works. But, the buck stops with you (see, Ownership).
53. Embrace “I could be wrong.”
This applies both to the solutions you provide as well as your assessment of the problem. Treat every assertion as a hypothesis and actively seek to disprove your assumptions (just like a scientist).
54. Separate facts from stories.
One way to follow the last step is to force yourself to distinguish between facts and stories. Facts are objective realities you can prove in a courtroom or laboratory. Everything else is a story: our fallible *interpretation of the facts*.
55. Recommended resource: Dan Cable, [How Humble Leadership Really Works](#).
“To put it bluntly, servant-leaders have the humility, courage, and insight to admit that they can benefit from the expertise of others who have less power than them. They actively seek the ideas and unique contributions of the [people] that they serve.”

Humility

The ability to put your ego, wants, or needs aside to serve others. Willingness to admit when you're wrong or don't have the answer.

1. Use the first-person plural when describing solutions
2. Use the first-person singular when describing mistakes.
3. Embrace "I could be wrong."
4. Separate facts from stories.
5. Recommended resource: Dan Cable, *How Humble Leadership Really Works*.

12. Adapt, adapt, adapt

Open to change and quickly modifying thoughts and actions to respond positively. To be flexible rather than rigid, set in our ways, or immovable.

We all aspire to be adaptable and care-free. However, let's face it, our actions and responses to change can sometimes be the complete opposite.

Adapting to customers allows you the power to control the situation without taking the power away from the customer. This makes the customer still feel served and appreciated.

Unfortunately, there are plenty of negative traits that undermine your ability to be adaptable in customer service:

- Rigidity: "You can only do it this way: *my way*."
- Bluntness: "How are you not understanding this?"
- Discontent: "No, I don't agree with what you're saying at all."
- Unapproachable: "Why are you calling me with this silly question?"
- Resistance: "This is the way we've always done it. That's just the way it is."
- Competition: "You don't know what you're talking about. (Subtext: I am the expert.)"

How to cultivate adaptability

56. Recognize your biological predisposition.

Old habits die hard. That's not just cliché; it's science. Change is hard is because our brains literally shape themselves based on how we typically think and act. But, rigidity is only half the story.

57. Also recognize "neuroplasticity"

Thankfully, brains can change. This is due to neuroplasticity: the pathways in our minds are strengthened by repetition. When we think or act in a new way over and over, we *physiologically* rebuild our neural network.

58. Cultivate adaptability like a habit.

Make it your intention to think differently *and act differently*. For example, instead of getting caught up in a heated exchange, put a rubberband around your wrist and snap it softly as a trigger to interrupt your old way of responding.

59. Practice it every day.


Becoming more adaptable will require effort, time, and repetition. Take note of the small wins at the end of each day and reflect on the situations where you could have been more adaptable to learn from for next time.

60. Recommended resource: Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*.

"This is how willpower becomes a habit: by choosing a certain behavior ahead of time, and then following that routine when an inflection point arrives."

Adaptability

Open to change and quickly modifying thoughts and actions to respond positively. To be flexible rather than rigid, set in our ways, or immovable.

1. Recognize your biological predisposition.
 2. Also recognize “neuroplasticity”.
 3. Cultivate adaptability like a habit.
 4. Practice it every day.
 5. Recommended resource: Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*.
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13. Take ownership and responsibility

The act of possessing a situation, problem, or challenge and seeing it through to resolution; taking control and taking responsibility.

At first, ownership may appear to be at odds with adaptability—in particular, the idea of *taking control*. It’s not.

Think of it like this: When a customer reaches out for help, they’re feeling lost, overwhelmed, and insecure. Failing to meet those conditions with a firm and steady hand leaves them trying to solve the problem alone. Worse, they don’t have all the resources you do.

You need to own the interaction if you are actually going to help them.

Of course, taking ownership doesn’t mean you have to personally solve the problem. Rather, you find a way to make sure it gets resolved.

Ownership language such as, “Let me see how I can help and—if not—I’ll find the right person,” prevents customers from feeling dismissed and isolated.

How to take ownership

61. Steer the conversation.

Take the reins and let the customer know they are in good hands. Trust is a

huge factor in earning high-service ratings. And trust arises from prompt responses that display confidence without arrogance.

62. Keep it actionable.

Break down issues so that there's agreement on both sides regarding the problem. Offer tangible steps that *they can perform*. If the customer can't fix it on their own, share with them your team's plan of action.

63. Follow-up proactively.

Leave no stone unturned. You own this, the customer is just following your lead now. On top of tangible steps and actions, agree upon deadlines for each one. Then, if they miss a deadline, be the first to check in.

64. Explain, but don't excuse.


The difference between an explanation and an excuse is a tightrope. The separation lies in our motivation. Excuses *defend* our actions. Explanations *clarify* them. Make accepting responsibility your default position.

65. Recommended resource: Jocko Willink, *Extreme Ownership*.

"Implementing Extreme Ownership requires checking your ego and operating with a high degree of humility. Admitting mistakes, taking ownership, and developing a plan to overcome challenges are integral to any successful team."

Ownership

The act of possessing a situation, problem, or challenge and seeing it through to resolution; taking control and taking responsibility.

1. Steer the conversation.
 2. Keep it actionable.
 3. Follow-up proactively.
 4. Explain, but don't excuse.
 5. Recommended resource: Jocko Willink, *Extreme Ownership*.
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14. Act with confidence

Expertly communicating to provide the mutual feeling that questions have been answered and issues have been acknowledged, addressed, and resolved.

Flowing right out of ownership is confidence.

Confidence provides security and closure. Customers feel certainty as they progress as well as clear-headed resolution at the end of the support exchange.

The opposite is also true. Customers can smell blood. Without confidence, they'll become restless, anxious, and irrational. They will continue to email, call, or ask to speak to a manager until you can provide them closure.

Steps to bolstering confidence

66. Manage expectations from the start.

If you're unable to respond immediately to new requests, help customers understand this. Simple auto-replies to let people know your team responds within 24 hours is far better than a day of silence. Their patience relies on your transparency.

67. Addressing every question.

Rather than sidestep complex or thorny inquiries, dive in head first and systematically address every single concern raised by a customer. Even if your answer is, "I need to look into that further," don't ignore any part of their email, phone, or chat.

68. Follow through with your promises.

Don't say you will call back at 9am with more information and decide to not call because the situation hasn't changed. You are better off calling the customer as you promised and still give them that update.

69. Let your body lead you.

Confidence can be hacked through body language—even when customers can't see us. "Power posing," as Amy Cuddy calls it, means making our bodies bigger. Not gaining weight, but assuming postures that extend our arms, shoulders, and legs.

70. Recommended resource: Amy Cuddy, [Your body language may shape who you are](#).

"Two minutes [of power posing] lead to hormonal changes that configure

your brain to basically be either assertive, confident and comfortable, or really stress-reactive, and feeling sort of shut down.”

Confidence



Expertly communicating to provide the mutual feeling that questions have been answered and issues have been acknowledged, addressed, and resolved.

1. Manage expectations from the start.
2. Addressing every question.
3. Follow through with your promises.
4. Let your body lead you.
5. Recommended resource: Amy Cuddy, Your body language may shape who you are.

15. Become a *teachable* teacher

The willingness and capability to learn from others.

Once you accept that you don't know everything, then you can embrace teachability.

What defines a teachable moment?

It's when you have the opportunity to learn something new, whether it's from someone else (a customer) or by teaching yourself.

Teachability is about taking the initiative to read the company updates that get sent through to your email, understanding changes that have been made to a particular product or service, and making the most of any training that is provided to you.

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty.”

Henry Ford

Having in-depth knowledge about the product or service can really set you apart in a customer service team. It makes you truly invaluable because you are more equipped to handle the complex and unknown issues.

How to cultivate teachability

71. Surround yourself with mentors.

In a perfect world, this would be leadership within your company; most notably, your manager. The next best are people you look up in other, non-competitor organizations. Regardless, set clear goals for what you hope to accomplish at the outset.

72. Cozy up to technicians.

Within every business there are builders, developers, and practitioners: the people who create and deploy whatever it is you sell. Set up a regular schedule for one-on-one time. And find ways to (for lack of a better term) *suck up to them*.

73. Examine your failures with detached curiosity.

Teachable people relish failure. They embrace the idea that every situation has only two outcomes: success or the opportunity to learn. Examining missteps like this takes the punch out of *losing* and reinforces other skills like humility and thick skin.

74. Celebrate and record your wins.

As your expertise grows, take note of standout moments. Maintain a physical journal or running Google Doc where you can record exactly what helped you discover something new. Such experiences are invaluable when teaching customers.

75. Recommended resource: Carol Dweck, *Mindset*.

“Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It’s about seeing things in a new way. When people change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework.”

Teachability

The willingness and capability to learn from others.

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2. Cozy up to technicians.
3. Examine your failures with detached curiosity.
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