

Title:

Stellar Customer Service in 10 Simple Steps

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Summary:

If you're like me, you've had plenty of experience with BAD customer service. Just think about the last time you had a bad experience with a product or a service.

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Article Body:

If you're like me, you've had plenty of experience with BAD customer service. Just think about the last time you had a bad experience with a product or a service.

Perhaps the product or service did not live up to the sales pitch. Maybe the company was unresponsive to your calls or emails. Maybe they did not do what they said they were going to do. Or they gave you the run-around when you called to report a problem or ask a question.

If you think about it, all of these negative experiences boil down to one thing, a lack of customer service. And a lack of customer service usually stems from a lack of customer focus. It seems many businesses have simply lost sight of who they are really in business to serve.

Instead of the old saying, "the customer is always right," many businesses seem almost bothered by customers these days. In fact, I'll let you in on a little secret from my early ad agency days. We used to have a saying, "this business would be great, if it wasn't for the clients."

How ridiculous is that?! We wouldn't have had a job if it weren't for the

clients (I'm older and wiser now!). Yes, sometimes clients can be difficult, but they are the reason we are in business. Our job is to serve them. If they are upset, we should welcome the opportunity to find out why, and use that information to improve our product or service.

Yes, sometimes you'll run into some yahoo who is being totally unreasonable and you just have to deal with it. But very often, client complaints uncover a problem or something we can improve upon.

So make it a point to really listen to your customers. Make a commitment to treat all your customers well. After all, giving great customer services is one of the best and cheapest marketing tools available. When you treat your customers well, or even better, when you deliver beyond their expectations, you will be rewarded.

Those happy clients are the same clients who will happily refer you. The opposite is also true. If you disappoint a client, or don't deliver what you promise, or you just plain treat them badly, they will likely tell everyone they know how horrible you are. In fact, those disgruntled clients are more likely to talk about you than your happy clients. Unfortunately, that's just the way it usually works.

The good news is, it's not hard to give great customer service. You simply have to be aware and make it a priority. Following are 10 tips to help you offer stellar customer service.

(1) Be accessible

Your customers should be able to get a hold of you, or someone in your company, if they have a question or if they need service. Provide multiple ways for your customers to get in contact with you, such as email, phone, mail or fax.

(2) Respond in a timely manner

Make it your policy to return all phone calls or emails within 24 hours. And, if you cannot commit to that, then determine what timeframe you can manage and let your customers know upfront they can expect to hear back from you within that amount of time.

(3) Listen to your customers

Often when a customer calls or writes to complain, they just want to be heard. In fact, sometimes, just listening is all you need to do. Take the time to listen to what your customers have to say before you start responding or defending your product or service. They may just have a point.

(4) Treat your customers with respect

Even if the customer on the other end of the phone is acting irrationally, or being rude, don't lower yourself to their level by reciprocating. Treat everyone with respect and you will be respected in return. Plus, you never know when someone's just having a bad day, and they happen to be taking it out on you (we've all done it).

(5) Don't argue with your customers

You can never win an argument with a customer. Because if you do win, you've more than likely alienated the customer and you've lost their business. We all

know the customer isn't really always right, but instead of focusing on what went wrong and defending yourself, focus on how you can solve the problem or fix the situation.

(6) Honor your commitments

If you say you will answer emails, then answer them. If you offer a guarantee, then honor it. Nothing spoils a customer relationship faster than being promised something and not getting it.

I got a nice email last week from a client that made me realize just how important this is. Here's what he wrote:

"Many thanks for your prompt and comprehensive reply. Your personal interest, caring and enthusiasm is clearly apparent. Most company owners invite you to respond and promise to reply personally, they seldom do so ..."

Yes, it took me some time to respond to his email. But I promise email support to all clients who purchase my 10stepmarketing System and therefore it is important to honor that commitment. If I ever get to the point I can no longer respond due to the volume of requests or other time commitments, I will stop offering this service, not just stop responding.

(7) Do what you say

If you say you're going to call someone on Tuesday, call them on Tuesday. It's as simple as that. If you want your customers to trust and believe you, you have to follow through and do what you say.

(8) Focus on making customer relationships, not sales

The long-term success of your business rests on your ability to make long-term customer relationships. If you sacrifice relationships to make short-term sales, your business will be short-lived.

(9) Be honest

Don't exaggerate the results your product or service will provide. Don't promise things you cannot deliver just to make a sale. I see hype all over the web these days; everything is a quick fix or a silver bullet. It suckers people into buying the product, and then the product doesn't deliver. Think that customer is ever going to make another purchase from that business? Not likely. Be honest and direct about what your products and services can deliver.

(10) Admit when you make a mistake

No one's perfect. We all make mistakes; it's part of learning. So when you do make a mistake, don't try to cover it up or deny it. Just admit it and if necessary, do something to make the situation right. Your customers will appreciate it and they'll be more likely to stay customers.

So how does your customer service measure up? Are you practicing these 10 steps and offering stellar customer service? If not, I challenge you to take your service up a notch. Approach it like Ken Blanchard and instead of just being satisfied with happy customers, create "Raving Fans" (a great little book if you haven't read it).

Commit to putting these 10 tips into practice. Get to know your customers. Make them the focus of your business. It's one of the keys to marketing success and

best of all, it doesn't cost very much!

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