



Customer Service

Tips for taking the best care of customers

Build customer relationships with TRUST

Figuring out ways to build business is every company's biggest challenge.

Right now, managers at your company are working hard to come up with new ideas for winning customers' hearts and their business. You can play an important role in this quest. How? By building customers' trust.

It's not as hard as it may sound. Use the *TRUST* technique to earn customer trust and build business:

- **Take time with customers.** Whether you're talking with them on the phone or in person, don't rush your customers. Give them as much time as they need to explain their needs and concerns. Invite them to ask questions.

When you show customers that you care enough to devote some real quality time to them, they'll

relax and begin to believe that you—and your organization—can fulfill their needs.

- **Respond to their questions.** Answer customers' questions as thoroughly as possible. Don't just rattle off quick and incomplete answers that leave customers more confused than they were to begin with.

If customers are confused, they'll feel uncomfortable about doing business with you. They'll feel unsure of what they're gaining for their money, so they'll hesitate to spend it. And you can't blame them for feeling that way.

- **Understand customers' needs.** Before you decide that you've wrapped up a customer interaction, make sure you understand what the customer wants and needs from you. *Ask yourself the following questions:*

Have I left any questions unanswered?

Did I miss any hidden messages by not reading between the lines?

Did the customer say anything I didn't fully understand but failed to clarify?

Am I offering the customer the solution that's really most appropriate for this situation?

Could I do something that

would better suit the customer's interest?

Is the customer genuinely happy with my response or just barely satisfied?

- **Soothe customers' feelings.** Whether they're angry, upset or just a tad disappointed, it's your job to respond to customers' feelings. Tell them you're sorry for anything that's gone wrong in their relationship with your company.

Assure them that you'll make things right. Empathize—say “I certainly would feel the same way if I were in your shoes.” Heartfelt empathy is a tried-and-true trust-builder whenever you're interacting with a customer.

- **Thank customers.** Let them know that you appreciate their time, their patience and their business. And thank them for their trust, as well. Tell them: “Thank you so much for putting your trust in our company” or “I really appreciate you giving me the opportunity to fulfill your needs today. I want you to be happy for the long run, so don't hesitate to let me know how I can help you again.”

By taking that approach, you'll ensure that those customers will come back to place their trust in you again and again.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

QUIZ: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT CUSTOMER SATISFACTION? 2

FURNISH CUSTOMERS WITH THE BEST FOLLOW-UP CARE IN THE BUSINESS ... 3

HOW TO PROVIDE OUTSTANDING SERVICE 4

How to provide outstanding service

For 10 years, Patricia Twitchell has owned and operated a specialty gift shop In Myrtle Creek, Ore. People from all over the country visit Just Bears and Stuff, and the store draws a very high percentage of repeat customers.

Working with customers has been an education for Twitchell. "In the ten years I've owned and operated Just Bears and Stuff, I've learned a great deal about customer service. Even though some of it was from books, tapes and articles such as you're reading right now, much of my insight came from my customers," she says.

Twitchell says she's reminded of the basics of customer service every day she's at the shop. Here are some of the guidelines that have allowed her to not only survive, but thrive in business for the last decade:

- **Make customers feel they're getting something special.** Remember their names and use them often. Get to know something about them. The more special they feel the more they'll want to return to do business with you again. Guaranteed.

- **Go the extra mile.** Make your customers feel they're the most special people to you, Twitchell says. "We offer beautiful gift wrapping at no extra charge. That's an added value I provide." What added value can you add to let your customers know you're going the extra mile?

- **Never make customers feel as if they're asking for something out of the ordinary.** Although customers may ask at times for more than you can give them, the way that you let them know that will determine the feeling they take away from the experience.

Always respect the request, avoid the word "but" when you reply. Tell customers: "I wish I could do that" or "You raise a good point. I'll bring that up at our next staff meeting."

- **Be knowledgeable about your product or service and industry.** Twitchell says: "When my customers look to me to make suggestions, they feel a sense of security in knowing that I know my product line extremely well. I pride myself in helping my customers select just the

right gift for whomever they're choosing it for."

- **Remember that you're dealing with real people** and with real needs. Regardless of the business you're in, customers make the choice to do business with you. If they feel that you're meeting their needs, they'll return again and again.

- **You can make a connection with customers** even if you never meet them face to face. Twitchell says: "Many customers find me on the Internet. I have customers all over the world, and each one is so special to me and they know it."

Don't let a lack of personal contact serve as your excuse to neglect relationship building. You can build solid relationships with customers face-to-face or over the phone. □

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FR493

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