

CUSTOMER SERVICE IS MORE THAN A DEPARTMENT

Is customer service a department or a philosophy in your company? When I ask people in seminars to define customer service, I hear things like, “The customer has a problem and we fix it.” “They have a question and we answer it.” “They need to return something and we handle it.” Implicit in each of these is the attitude that customer service is reactive and problem-focused. Absent a problem or question, the customer does not receive service.

To appreciate our definition of customer service, you must understand customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is generally expressed as a ratio: It is a function of your performance and the customer’s expectations. If you out-perform their expectations, you have satisfied customers. If you under-perform their expectations, you have dissatisfied customers.

Every interaction with your company affects customer satisfaction. The way you do your job, work with your peers, and interface with customers affect customer satisfaction. Salespeople sell the first experience with your company, but it is the total experience with your company that determines repeat business. How everyone in your company performs on the job affects customer satisfaction. Individual and team effort affect the quality of your products and services.

Customer service must be a philosophy in which all employees feel and act accountable for creating satisfied customers. It is not a department or group of people. Everyone in your company is responsible for creating satisfied customers. You are responsible. Your peers are responsible. Your boss is responsible. It must be a proactive philosophy. You do not wait for the customer to have a problem to deliver service. Being proactive with service means never having to say you are sorry. Many times when you deliver proactive service, no one knows it except you. You know you did it, but you may be the only person who knows it. Your reward comes from the intrinsic satisfaction of knowing you did a great job.

Customer service is not rocket science. It is taking care of customers in a way that makes them want to return with their friends. The principles of customer service are simple. Practicing them is more challenging. Serving is not a spectator sport. It is an active process of working with customers to help them achieve their objectives. It begins with the attitude that serving is a privilege, not a pain.

This is a great time to begin your customer service initiative. According to the University of Michigan Business School, the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ASCI) has dropped in recent years. Another study found that 72% of Americans believe we are ruder as a society now than at any time in history. It costs the average company ten times more to get a new customer than to keep an existing customer happy. These realities coupled with shrinking margins and lost customers have businesses scrambling for ways to improve their service levels and profits. The most effective way to achieve this is to inspire employees to care about the level of service they provide.

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