

*Excerpt From:*

## **10 Steps to Successful Customer Service**

By Maxine Kamin

### **Chapter Two**

#### ***Define Great Service for Your Organization***

Overview

Recognize what customers want

Create customer loyalty

Understand the importance of word of mouth

Review leadership behaviors

After you have determined that there are solid reasons to be in your field, the next step is to define the elements of great service. This requires responses to the questions:

- What do your customers think is great service?
- What do your customers want?
- What creates loyalty?

#### **Recognize What Customers Want**

The answers to the previous questions might seem obvious, but they are not always apparent. What you think customers want may not be important to them at all. For instance, in the 1980s, leaders in some companies determined that it was critical for phones to be answered within a certain amount of rings, usually three. Companies scrambled to have enough staff for phones to be picked up by the third ring. However, after extensive study by service firms, researchers discovered that customers were willing to wait longer for their phone to be answered if they received what they expected when the connection was finally made: courteous and efficient service.

Current research validates studies conducted in the past. Pleasing customers, in whatever terminology you choose to use, has been and continues to be the overall goal of great service. TARP, one of the most recognized customer service research firms, now uses the term “customer delight” to describe exemplary service. Delight is achieved when:

- Customers receive service beyond their normal expectations
- Customers are “surprised” with pleasurable experience leading to positive word of mouth.

Many books have been written with the same “take people by surprise” theme, evident in the titles: *The Pursuit of Wow!* (Peters, 1994), *Positively Outrageous Service* (Gross, 1991), *Treat Your Customers* (Miglani, 2006), and *Delivering Knock Your Socks Off*

Service (Performance Research Associates, 2007). Surprise is all about delivering fabulous service using random acts of kindness.

### Create Customer Loyalty

People can be wowed in many ways. Just a greeting, such as, “How are you doing today?” could be a surprise and a pleasure. To capture the hearts of customers on a more permanent basis, an ongoing relationship is important to sustain positive feelings that have grown in the short term.

Actions that produce **customer loyalty** (sustained commitment) are:

- Proactively providing information
- Notifying the customer of new opportunities
- Avoiding unpleasant surprises
- Providing consistently good service
- Creating personal relationships.

As TARP points out, the behaviors don’t take much time, but produce the longest lasting and most dramatic results. The following story illustrates how a few minutes can have a lasting impression.

*“The first time I got a call from a clothing store announcing an upcoming sale, I was totally astonished. The manager, who enthusiastically assists me in the store, called me personally to say that some items she knew I liked were on sale. I thought that was so considerate! I went to the store and purchased the outfits, on sale, as promised. I continue to shop in the store, and at times, just drop in to say hello to the manager when I am in the mall. Of course, I usually buy something.”*

The previous example of customer loyalty was a direct result of a manager proactively providing information (phone call), notifying the customer of new opportunities (sale on particular clothing), avoiding unpleasant surprises (price as described), providing

#### Staples

Staples are focal points for service. While they may be simple and often overlooked, applying these staples regularly and consistently will make the difference between mediocre and excellent service.

- Be friendly.
- Establish rapport.
- Listen to what a customer wants to tell you.
- Be especially kind when someone has experienced a loss.
- Provide information.
- Continually provide good service even in the tough times.
- Ignore customer mistakes.
- Bend the rules if you can.
- Tell the customer about a sale coming up or a new product or service.

consistently good service (had been helpful before), and creating personal relationships (participated in warm, friendly conversation in the store and on the phone). Mission accomplished. And it was simple.

The following are examples of staples that can be used to provide excellent service.

## **Demonstrate Personal Effectiveness**

Personal effectiveness creates a foundation for building customer loyalty. The Forum Corporation, another top-notch research firm, identifies the following areas for personal effectiveness:

- Effective communication
- Service attitude
- Problem solving
- Continuous learning
- Integrity

*10 Steps to Effective Customer Service* addresses these five areas of personal effectiveness. These themes will be recognized throughout the book. Topics in subsequent steps will provide ways to improve communication and problem solving, promote a service attitude, and foster continuous learning and integrity.

Recommendations are provided based on a landmark study by Leonard Berry and his associates at Texas A&M University (Performance Research Associates, 2006). They conducted the original research for the long-standing, successful *Knock Your Socks Off* customer service series, which focused on the following elements of customer expectations.

## **Recognize the Importance of Research**

It's good to know why certain behaviors are being suggested as ways to enhance service. Research is conducted to provide a roadmap on how to excel, whether it's for the company's gain or for your peace of mind and enjoyment at work – both important objectives. However, as we all know from roadmaps and MapQuest, you can't always "get there from here" without being aware of the terms used on a map, their interpretation, and how to regroup when directions are erroneous. Following the steps in this chapter will provide you with the most direct route to get you where you want to go and lead you to your final destination of great service.

### **Customer Expectations**

- Reliability – delivering what is promised.
- Responsiveness – doing it promptly.
- Assurance – knowing how to do it.
- Empathy – doing it with respect and understanding.
- Tangibles – ensuring that buildings, surroundings, and materials are attractive.

## WORKSHEET 2.1

### Your View of Customer Expectations

*Instructions:* Complete Worksheet 2.1 to gauge your awareness of what customers want.

Who are your customers? What are their demographics \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What do they consider important? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you know? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does your organization define great customer service? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you think of your organization's customer service? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are ways you can bend the rules? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you do best when serving clients? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can you improve? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did you learn about customer service expectations from this step? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

***10 Steps to Exceptional Customer Service* by Maxine Kamin**

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