

Handout

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# SkillSharpener Web Extra

## Build rapport on the phone

Even though technology improves service efficiency, customers still crave a personal approach in their interactions with companies, says customer retention trainer Laura Michaud.

Michaud points out that 40% of customers who are satisfied with your company's service and/or products will still take their business to a competitor, given the opportunity.

"Even if you work with short-term customers or your company sells inexpensive products, if you can build rapport, you can keep those customers coming back," she says.

To do that, you have to provide a level of service that goes beyond satisfying their expectations — you need to build a relationship by establishing rapport with your customers.

### Find some common ground

Naturally, developing a relationship over the phone is not as easy as in a face-to-face situation.

Michaud suggests trying to find something you have in common with the caller or a topic to which you can both relate. Making a comment on the weather is a good way to get the conversation started on a friendly, more personal note, she says.

Also, look for any type of connection you may have with a customer. "People relate to people like themselves," she points out. For instance, if you know that the caller has a child on a soccer team and so do you, or if it's snowing in both of your locations.

### Show concern by listening

Another way to establish rapport over the phone is by showing concern and listening — especially if you're dealing with a disgruntled caller.

"You don't have to buy into or agree with whatever the caller is asking for, but by listening and being a good sounding board, you're going to go a long way toward developing rapport with that person," Michaud says.

### Use a little humor to break down barriers

Have you ever been to a company outing or group gathering where you didn't know very many of the people there?

You may also have found that once you struck up a conversation with someone and started laughing, later, when you came across that person again, you had developed a close relationship.

"The same thing happens with customers," Michaud says.

But, she cautions, take care with the type of joking you use. "Don't use any humor that may degrade someone," she says.

### Keep a positive attitude

While it's not easy to stay upbeat all the time, there are a few tried-and-true tricks of the trade that Michaud says will help you to keep positive.

- Keep a mirror in front of you while you're on the phone. You've heard it before, but Michaud stresses that it really works.
- Decorate your workstation with personal items — pictures of family, friends, pets, places you've been — whatever makes you feel good when you look at it.
- Dress for success. Wearing clothes that make you feel good about yourself can help you to maintain a more positive attitude throughout the work day.
- Finally, she says, try treating your customers like family when they call. If you can put the same amount of enthusiasm in your greeting of a caller that you do when your favorite relative calls, you'll make the customer feel welcome, and are on your way to building rapport and long-term relationships.

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