



# SkillSharpener Web Extra

## Are you acting as a team player?

A focus on teamwork and mutual support will improve performance and make working in customer service more engaging for everyone.

Teamwork is an important part of customer service. Frontline reps spend a lot of time in close quarters with their coworkers, dealing with difficult customer issues and problems, and the more reps can help each other, the better everyone will be at their jobs.

As Renée Evenson, author of *Powerful Phrases for More Effective Customer Service* and *Award-Winning Customer Service*, puts it, "You may not always be grouped with the people you would choose to be with, but why not make the best of it? It's better for the individual, and for the group, for team members to really support each other and work with each other. It's going to make your work environment more pleasant, and individuals will get much more satisfaction out of their work."

"Customer service stars — those who encourage open communication and who work to build strong teams — simply achieve better results," Evenson says. "When you and your coworkers pull together, you will challenge each other to do your best, to consistently perform well, and to provide a high level of customer service."

### The basics of being a team player

What does it mean to be a good team player? To start, it means being a good communicator, says Evenson. "It's someone who is supportive and helpful to others, who communicates in a positive, constructive manner, and who thinks before they speak. It's a person who is trusting and who seeks to build trusting relationships with others."

That sort of behavior may not come naturally to everyone, but it is something that can be

learned. "If you are not naturally an open, outgoing person who is used to being helpful and supportive of others, look around you to identify others who are the way you want to be and try to emulate those people," Evenson says.

In addition, Evenson recommends embracing the following seven behaviors. Each one will help you grow into a better team player:

- **Share credit with coworkers.** A successful team player will take a "we, not me" approach to team members and team communications. "Just speaking in terms of 'we' — 'We did this' or 'We need to do that' — is very important. It shows that you are thinking in terms of the group rather than just thinking of yourself," says Evenson.
- **Look for opportunities to help others.** And give other team members the opportunity to pitch in and help you. In fact, says Evenson, "try adopting a 'how

### Try these team-building tips

How can you be a better team player? Here are some suggestions from Renée Evenson:

- Make a habit of always saying "we," not "you" or "I."
- Use the words "our team" when talking to coworkers.
- Build a climate of trust by showing your teammates that you trust them.
- Encourage open communication by being a good listener, using positive language, and expecting the same from others.
- Think before you speak to make sure that what you are about to say is constructive.
- Compliment positive behaviors in others.





can we help' approach. So that the next time someone needs or asks for your help in solving a problem, you involve the team. Then together, come up with the best solution and give credit to the team."

- **Show your respect.** Let team members know that you respect them and encourage them to do the same. "When you respect others, they are more likely to respect you, says Evenson. It's that simple. The more respect you give, the more you receive.

One of the best ways to show respect is through good communication. "Be a good listener, and when called upon to offer commentary or advice, use positive language," says Evenson. "That's really important — along with keeping each other informed on what is going on. I think a lot of the process of building respect really boils down to good communication skills."

- **Express your appreciation.** Offering compliments makes others feel good about themselves, and when people feel good, they respond positively. "And when you make somebody else feel good, you are going to feel good yourself," says Evenson. "So when you see a coworker doing something well, offer a compliment — whether it is something simple or even something not directly work-related."

"Let's say your coworker was talking to a customer and used a certain phrase that you hadn't heard used in that situation before," she says. "You might say, 'That was a great phrase to use in that situation. I saw how well she responded to you.' Just offer a little compliment like that, and the little things will often add up to big things."

- **Share your enthusiasm.** If you are motivated and enthusiastic about your work and about helping others, your enthusiasm will rub off on others and your entire team will work better together. But it may take some time. "The important thing is to do all

you can to build a positive work environment — one that includes everybody and that involves everyone in team discussions and decisions," says Evenson.

"Enthusiasm has to come from within, but when you help to build that kind of supportive work relationship where everybody begins to trust each other and they begin cooperating with each other — then you become more cohesive and creative as a group," she adds.

- **Take time to get to know each other.** Teamwork always comes easier when people know each other and have some level of personal connection. Just as you look to build rapport with your customers, use those same skills to get to know and build solid rapport with the people on your team.

And, of course, says Evenson, laughter often accompanies rapport. And good team players know how to laugh — not at each other but with each other. "Laughing together can really enthuse the team. So look for good, positive reasons to share a laugh with team members."

- **Be honest about your own abilities.** Recognize your own qualities, strengths, and shortcomings in terms of teamwork and team support and work on building the strengths and minimizing the shortcomings. "We are all a work in progress throughout our lives," Evenson says, "and it's important to be able to honestly assess who you are, what your goals are, and what you need to do to achieve those goals."

Becoming a cohesive, high-performing team of customer service reps that motivates and supports each other in pursuit of team goals will help everyone on the team to perform at a higher level overall and provide a more positive customer experience. But teamwork doesn't develop by itself. The seven behaviors recommended by Evenson will start your team on the right path. ■

