



SkillSharpener Web Extra

Keep your morale up by thinking — and acting — positively

It's part of the customer service rep's job to maintain a positive attitude and present a positive face to customers, but that isn't always easy.

What can you do? "It starts at the very highest level of thinking — in our personal attitudes and in how we think and communicate with ourselves," says JoAnna Brandi of JoAnna Brandi & Company, a customer service consulting firm. "Customer service reps have to look at themselves and acknowledge that either they chose that job or the job somehow chose them. But either way, it's in their best interests, as well as in the best interest of the customer, for them to show up and be positive."

Brandi shares three practical strategies:

Create your own self-improvement plan

In part, this is a matter of focusing on the things one can control and paying less attention to things that one can't control. And one way to take control, Brandi says, is to "take personal responsibility for getting a little bit better in your job every day."

"It really does something for people when they can throw themselves into a self-improvement routine like that. It helps to motivate them, it helps build their self-esteem, and it helps to make them a more valuable employee," Brandi says.

Try spending five or 10 minutes each morning reading something that inspires or motivates you to do a better job, or read a few pages out of a customer service handbook or guidebook. Each day, try to find a single customer service improve-

ment tactic that you can try to apply during your customer contacts throughout the day. "And keep up the positive self-talk about the efforts you are making and the impact you are having on customers as a result of those efforts," she says. "That desire to make yourself better no matter what can really help to get you through some tough times."

Keep track of your successes

Brandi suggests that reps keep a little notebook on their desks and jot some notes after each customer call about how they handled that call — kind of grade yourself on how well you handled each call.

"We all know that working in customer service can sometimes seem a little thankless, and this kind of record-keeping can help to keep up your spirits and keep up your efforts," she says. "Think of it as a victory log, or just a place where you can jot down your small wins during the day. And at the end of the day, focus your attention on the successes. Think, 'Well, out of all the customers I had today, there were twelve that I did really exceptionally well with — and I know that when they hung up the phone they were smiling.'"

Learn to manage your own stress levels

"There's no doubt that customer service is a stressful job," Brandi says. "But the amount of stress you take home every day is up to you and how you frame the situation."



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Many people add drama to commonplace events. "They have a difficult conversation with a customer, and as soon as they get off the phone they tell everyone, 'Oh, that was the worst customer that I ever had.'" Brandi says. But that only raises stress levels all around.

Other people are defensive when they encounter a customer who is angry or demanding or unreasonable. "When you take things personally and let yourself be put on the defensive by this type of customer you are in for a tougher time because your body reacts with an instinctive fight or flight

reaction, releasing biochemicals that are going to eat away at you over the course of your time on the phones," Brandi says.

Instead, learn the difference between "reacting" and "responding," she says. And learn to distance yourself mentally from the situation when you perceive that a customer is angry or difficult. "Instead of allowing that to trigger an automatic physical response, train yourself to think something like, 'I wonder what is so wrong in this person's life that he has to speak to me like that?' or 'I wonder what I can possibly do to give this person a hand?'" ■

