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Excelling in Customer Service

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*Jae*LIMITED

PO Box 59909 Potomac, MD 20859
301.948.7636 fax 888.276.1998

www.jaelimited.com

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Customer Service



What is Customer Service?

Customer service is the way you treat the people who deal with your organization. These folks can be paying or non-paying customers, outside associates, or staff members. You know your customers better than anyone else, and the customers' positive or negative perception of that service is how they perceive your entire organization. The objective is to provide customers great service. Great service is when they compliment you or send outstanding comments to your boss.

All the people we work with are our customers and deserve VIP treatment. When we treat all of our customers like VIPs, we start to become known as an organization that offers exceptional service to everyone.

The following statements exemplify the true meaning of customer service.

- Going above and beyond what is expected.
- Doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.
- Adding value and integrity to every interaction.
- Being at your best with every customer.
- Putting yourself in your customer's shoes.



Who Are Our Customers?

For many of us, customers are easy to identify. We serve them in some way. But some people will say, "*I don't work directly with customers.*" Before you accept this idea, take a closer look at whom your customers are.

In most organizations, customers take two forms: internal and external. **Internal customers** are those people or departments within your organization served by what you do. The only person who has no internal customers is the rare individual who works completely alone. For the rest of us, internal customers are a fact of life. A word processing clerk or copy center worker within an organization serves other workers' needs for documents.

As individuals, we all have at least one internal customer, our boss. We may also have internal customers in the form of people we supervise. They rely on us to meet their needs.

External customers are those people who are the end users of our organization's services.

What Do People Want?

Well, at the most basic level, our customers have some similar needs.

- They want to be understood.
- They want to feel welcome.
- They want to feel important.
- They want to feel comfortable.



Chapter 2: What Are Our Standards?



Standards, expectations and targets are good because they give us something to strive for; they tell us what we have to do to have our supervisors judge our work as satisfactory.

However, we should make certain that our standards are meeting or exceeding the expectations of our other customers. And the only way to do this is to ask our customers, on an ongoing basis, if they are satisfied with the service.

What drives our organization?

Elements of Customer Service

There are five core elements of customer service that should be incorporated into day-to-day customer interactions. When these elements are combined, they have the effect of helping you establish great rapport with your customers that leads to building good communications, trust and loyalty.

The five core elements are:

1. Courtesy
2. Friendliness
3. Empathy
4. Knowledge
5. Responsiveness

Courtesy occurs when you treat your customer politely and show respect. It's about using good manners when speaking with your customer. This means:

- Showing interest in the customer's needs
- Giving the customer your full, undivided attention
- Using courtesy words, such as please and thank you

Friendliness is when you project kindness, a helpful attitude, and build rapport with your customer by listening and showing enthusiasm. This means:

- Communicating with a positive attitude which sends the message of friendliness
- Making a social connection (or building rapport) through small talk

Empathy shows that you identify with the customer's feelings, thoughts or attitudes. It shows the connectivity between you and the customer. This means:

- Demonstrating sensitivity to the customer's feelings
- Using actions, words, tone of voice, and body language to show you understand the customer's concerns

Knowledge is extremely critical in customer service because you need to demonstrate your skills, expertise and product/service information. It allows you meet or even exceed your customer's expectations. Showing your knowledge leads to credibility, trust and confidence. This means:

- Knowing your product or service
- Being resourceful

Responsiveness means finding out what your customer wants and taking the appropriate action to answer or resolve the purpose of the contact. This means:

- Finding out what the customer wants
- Coordinating efforts with others, if needed, to satisfy the customer's needs
- Letting the customer know of his or her options

Chapter 3: Meeting Expectations

All customers' needs are important. All customers want to be treated like they are your only customers. They know that isn't true, as you do, but they still want that kind of attention. A significant way for you to be successful is to help other people have their needs met.



In the larger sense, customers expect us to meet expectations in four critical areas.

First Impressions

Timeliness

Quality

Consistency

NOTES



Chapter 4: Dealing with Stress

Stress is unavoidable. Some of us may have too much of it, but we can choose how we deal with it. Since dealing with stress is a choice, it's beneficial to know some of the basics.

Stress and Resilience

Each stressful experience that you have prepares you to deal with one in the future. The more resilient you become, the less of an impact these events have on your mind and body. A lot of us try to avoid stress, and although avoidance initially feels like you're doing alright, the reality is that stressful things come up in our life all the time. The better we are at handling them, the more resilient we become, and the healthier we can be.

Each stressful experience can lead us into a cycle of confusion and even anguish. If we stay with those feelings, however, things actually get worse. But if we make a decision to deal with those circumstances by problem solving and adapting, we develop resilience. This means we can enjoy life more and be more successful.

As you encounter more stressors in life (and we all do), you can rely on the experiences you've had in dealing with negative circumstances in order to cope. You get more effective at managing that cycle of confusion and anguish, problem solving, adapting, and moving on.

Some Stress “Busters”

Deep Breathing

Close your eyes, mentally relax your body, and take ten or more deep breaths. Each time you exhale, count silently: “*one*,” after the first breath, “*two*,” after the second breath, etc., up to at least ten. If you lose count, or find yourself working on thoughts as they pass through your mind, start your count over again. When you are finished, you should feel calmer and more relaxed. (Your blood pressure will go down temporarily too.) If you're in a meeting, on the phone, or with a customer, count silently.

Visualization

Use positive imagery to boost your confidence and enhance your performance. Couple this with positive language for even better results. Negative words and images have been proven to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Pick a scene that relaxes you, and take yourself there – at least in your mind.

Exercise

Of all the ways to lessen the effects of stress, exercise is the one best because it meets your body's needs in so many ways. For stress specifically, aerobic exercise gets your heart pounding which releases the “*feel good*” brain chemicals that reduce stress hormones. Nonaerobic exercises like yoga also help by stretching and relaxing muscles which can tense up during periods of stress.



Music

Music has the power to soothe, or to give us energy. It actually has healing power. Find music that relaxes you, and play it when you need to calm down. When you feel tired and listless, play rousing music (rather than using caffeine) to give yourself a pick-up.