

From Ordinary to Extraordinary— Five Ways to Exceed at Customer Service

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Every organization aims to have exceptional customer service. The reality is that most companies only give lip service to exceeding customer expectations and continue to do as they have always done. Even with advanced technologies, many researchers actually report service has declined rather than improved. Those businesses that demonstrate they value their customers distinguish themselves from their competitors. They retain customers for life. Additionally, customers spread the news to their friends and colleagues. So what are the key elements to creating world class service?

1—Treat your customer like your grandmother.

Top notch service companies treat their customers as if they were their grandmothers. Reps are courteous, warm and friendly to each caller, not just the first few of the day. The expectation is that every customer, whether internal or external, should be treated as if they were the most important caller of the day, instead of a nameless, faceless entity. Reps are solicitous and caring, even when the caller is difficult. They consciously watch their tone of voice and how they explain things. They understand that the customer comes first- not the tasks of the job.

2—Have a shared vision.

Every one from the top down knows the goal is to provide exceptional service at all times, not just on occasion. No matter what their position, people understand what it means to the organization if a customer is lost, and thus they are committed to keeping customers happy. They recognize that it is six times more expensive to get a new customer and, ultimately, it is the customer who writes their paycheck.

3—Go the extra mile.

Instead of providing what is acceptable and required, people do the maximum- they go the extra mile. Recently, I was at a Marriott Hotel in Raleigh Durham, North Carolina. When I reviewed my bill

under my door, I called the front desk person to say that a room service charge was not on my bill. At the check out counter, the manager said they couldn't immediately locate the bill so he would enter "no charge" when it was located. That way, I would not be delayed. He apologized for the inconvenience. By doing more than what was expected, the manager insured that the next time I would chose his hotel over others.

4—Under promise and over deliver.

In the heat of the moment, it is easy to commit to do something for a customer that isn't possible. We may promise a delivery today by 3 pm, but the ground service can't accommodate it. Or, we may say we will call back immediately with an answer, but we can't get a hold of the right person until tomorrow. It is always better to under promise. If we exceed expectations, customers are ecstatic.

5—Ask people what they think.

Positive feedback is nice but not particularly helpful. We have to understand where service lags in order to improve it. The easiest way is to survey our customers on a continuous basis. That way, processes or procedures that aren't working can be fixed or updated. Issues can't be resolved unless they are known.

Today's customers have choices. When they receive exceptional service, they remain loyal. They like the feeling of being valued. They are even willing to pay more for it. To move your organization from ordinary to extraordinary, it is important to pay attention to these five key issues.

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