

Adopt a Customer Service Attitude

Consider this: A customer service representative says the right things and transacts the business with efficiency but also with an air of indifference (or worse). Are you satisfied? No! Like everyone else, you expect to be treated with courtesy and respect.

On the other hand, if a customer service provider shows a sincere willingness to serve and makes an earnest attempt to get it right but misses a few of the key skills, are you satisfied? In most cases, yes.

Customer service — whether that means selling shoes or fixing phones — is an intrinsically rewarding profession. The people who understand this fact are the ones who excel and who help to distinguish their company from its competitors.

Over the years, I've heard countless clients say that when hiring employees they value a candidate's service-oriented attitude far more than technical skills or even product/industry knowledge. This is because they have learned from experience that the skills and the procedures can be taught; attitude has to come from within.

I could go on and on about the importance of attitude, but since I included "customer service skills" in the title of this post, I would feel remiss if I didn't identify what I feel to be some key skills in customer service.

#1 Positive language

Positive language is the art of using words and phrases to create a positive image in the customer's mind—with an emphasis on what *can* be done, not on what cannot. Using positive language shows a willingness to serve and a commitment to building customer loyalty. It's especially important to use positive language when saying no or delivering bad news to a customer.

Following are two examples of a customer service provider conveying the same message with and without positive language.

Example 1

Without positive language: "You have to take the system offline before I can make the repair."

With positive language: "In order to make the repair, I need to temporarily take the system offline. This prevents permanent loss of stored data."

Example 2

Without positive language: "I can't get you that product until April; it's backordered."

With positive language: "That product will be available in April. I can place the order for you now and make sure the product is sent to you as soon as it reaches our warehouse."

#2 Listening

Customers need to feel that they've been heard and understood, and that doesn't happen without good listening on the part of the customer service representative. I'm not sure I've ever consulted in a customer

service environment in which I didn't recognize poor listening as a strong contributing factor to poor performance (and by extension, poor service).

Following are three keys to good listening in any customer service situation.

1. Focus. (This is the hardest part!)
2. Listen for key facts *and* key feelings.
3. Take notes. (Nobody has as good a memory as he or she wants to believe.)

#3 Confirming satisfaction

Another key skill in customer satisfaction is confirming satisfaction before ending the transaction.

This skill demonstrates to the customer three important things:

- That you care about getting it right
- That you're willing to keep going until you get it right
- That the customer is the one who determines what "right" is.

Confirming satisfaction also accomplishes a smooth, subtle shift in "ownership" of the issue. When the customer says in his or her own words, "Yes, I'm satisfied," the transaction is complete and successful—in the customer's mind as well as in yours.