

### 3 Important Traits Of Customer Service

By Dr. Alan Zimmerman

*"Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends."* Walt Disney

Dr. Alan Zimmerman's Personal Commentary:

If you ever think customers aren't important, try doing business without them for 90 days. You'll soon find yourself OUT of business.

And yet, when I talk and write about customer service, there are always a few cynics who think price is the only thing that counts in getting and keeping customers. In fact, they might as well hang a sign in the window that says "We give lousy service, but we're cheap." After all, that's how they operate.

Other folks get a little defensive when I push them to improve their customer service. One audience member even told me, "Hey, Zimmerman, we're no worse than anybody else." I thought, "Wow, what a wonderful advertising slogan: 'We're no worse than anybody else.' That should really pull in the customers and cement their loyalty."

The truth is ... in today's challenging marketplace, the quality of your service may be one of the few competitive advantages you can offer your customers. That's why I just published my newest book, **"The Service Payoff: How Customer Service Champions Outserve And Outlast The Competition."** If the book stops you from making one little service mistake or helps you make one little service improvement, the book will have paid for itself ... and I believe this book will pay for itself hundreds of times over.

But let me give you three tips you can run with right now. "The Service Payoff" book will give hundreds of additional tips.

#### **1. Take on a service attitude.**

Some people think customer service is a "department." It's simply a job some people have to do all the time.

Others think customer service is a "job function." It's something everybody has to do on occasion.

Unfortunately, those are half-truths at best. In fact, customer service is more about attitude than mere behavior. If you do all the "right" things in

customer service but your attitude stinks, guess what? Your service also stinks.

You see ... the customer doesn't care about your flat tire, your unruly kid, your tight budget, your cranky coworker or whatever else is souring your attitude ... and he shouldn't have to care. He has a right to expect a positive attitude from you every time in every situation.

Of course, I've written extensively over the years on how to get and keep a positive attitude, so I won't go into great detail here. But I will say this ... if you sometimes struggle with keeping your attitude positive, read Christian Larsen's poem to yourself once in the morning and once in the evening. Over time, it will give you a more positive attitude that will seep into your customer service.

Larsen writes:

**"Promise yourself:**

- To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
- To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.
- To make all your friends feel that there is something in them.
- To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.
- To think only of the best, to work only for the best and expect only the best.
- To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.
- To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.
- To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.
- To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.
- To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and too happy to permit the presence of trouble."

The more you read it, say it, and think it, the more you will become it.

**2. Present yourself as a service professional.**

I don't care what kind of business you're in, you're still going to be judged by the way you look and the way you sound. Customers form impressions of your business, your products and services ... partly based on their impression of YOU.

So take an honest look at your presence and demeanor. Internal customers are much more willing to work with you and external customers are much

more willing to buy from you if they like you. And they're much more likely to like you if you look or sound good.

Whether that's fair or unfair, it's the truth. Your customers or potential customers will often decide to cooperate or not cooperate with you based on these "superficial" factors.

You've got to look your best. You've got to look like a professional no matter what job you perform.

I think of a painter from a small town. He was often upset about local issues and would show up at town board meetings ... unshaven, dressed in frayed, paint-spotted clothes ... contemptuous of those who dressed up to impress others. He said if people had any brains they'd see his point no matter what he wore. But year after year they didn't. He concluded they were stupid, but perhaps he was too. His appearance made it very difficult for him to sell his point of view to his so-called customers.

You've also got to sound your best. Men and women with poor diction and a limited vocabulary are generally not allowed to rise to the top ranks of their profession ... or even be allowed to use all their talents. Other people tend to dismiss them or at least think less of them.

The same is true for people who shorten words or overuse slang. You need to sound intelligent but not arrogant. Speak full, correct words. Say "going" rather than "goin," and ask "will you come here" rather than mumble "comere." Use real words like "yes" instead of "yeah" or "no" instead of "nah."

And finally

### **3. Meet their needs.**

Every one of your customers has a need. That's why he is coming to you. But the need is more than wanting a particular service or product. The need has an emotional component as well. The customer needs to FEEL good about her interaction with you.

In particular, the customer wants to FEEL five things when he's doing business with you. And to the extent you make your customers FEEL these things, she's going to be a loyal customer.

#### **Make your customers feel ...**

1. **Welcome.** When someone calls your place of business, do they get a cheerful, "Glad you called" kind of response? Or do they get a curt,

hurried, "Yeah, whaddya want?" If you're greetings sound more like the latter example, then don't expect your customers to be very satisfied.

2. **Comfortable.** Does your workplace create an atmosphere that is conducive to business? Does your office appear as though everything is in order and under control? Do you come across as patient so your customer feels it's okay to share his story or ask her questions? If you answered "yes" to these questions, you're making your customer feel comfortable.
3. **Understood.** Do you ask questions and paraphrase what the customer tells you ... even though you may have heard the same comment from several other customers? If so, he's going to feel understood rather than brushed off or tolerated.
4. **Important.** Everybody wants to feel like a somebody. And you help your customers feel important when you take the time to get to know him, his likes and dislikes, and what works and doesn't work for him. He feels important when you tailor your product or service to his exact needs.
5. **Appreciated.** The first four feelings are vital, but Dr. William James, the famed psychologist, said, "The deepest craving in human nature is the craving to feel appreciated." If you do that, you stand out from the crowd of your competitors. After all, you will never be able to give your internal customers all the money they want or your external customers all the discounts they want. But you can extend appreciation over and over again. It costs you nothing but gains you everything.

Good service will bring you customers. Great service will keep your customers. And great service starts with these three strategies we just discussed.

**Action: Select two behaviors you will implement ... starting today ... that will help you come across more professionally.**

Dr. Alan R. Zimmerman CSP, CPAE **is an** Internationally recognized motivational speaker **who** gives people the tools they need to maximize their payoffs ...personally, professionally, and organizationally.  
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