

Customer Service – Is it all talk?

Maria L. Novak

Everyone talks about Customer Service – Many businesses use this phrase in their advertising and marketing but how do you really “service” your customers. You hear it everywhere but are businesses really following through on their promises. A few years ago, I wrote an article Critical Listening which goes hand-in-hand with Customer Service – Not only do you need to really truly listen to your clients and potential clients, but you need to anticipate their needs before they ask.

What's the most common customer service situation? A customer or client seeking help. So it's extremely important to get this service interaction right. Properly done, a customer seeking help will not only feel that she or he has been treated well but will be more favorably disposed toward referring you to others. Use the following tips for better customer service:

1) Be available in a timely manner.

The first way that you make your customer feel valued is by acknowledging him/her as soon as possible.

You need not be accessible 24/7 but you need to be responsive in a timely manner.

2) Appear eager to help (but not in such an aggressive fashion that the customer is turned off).

Doing points one and two properly are often all that's required to truly service your clients.

3) Help by directly addressing the customer's request/solving the customer's problem.

This may involve:

- Actively listening to your client. Ask clarifying questions when the customer is finished speaking if necessary to get more details that will enable you to solve their problem. Do not interrupt when he or she is speaking. You can't listen when your mouth is moving.
- Showing a knowledge of your business's products and/or services. And be sure that you know the difference between "showing knowledge" and "showing off". Customers do not want to hear lectures about particular products or services. For good customer service, tell what they want to know, not everything you know about it.
- Showing a knowledge of related products and/or services. Customers commonly compare products and/or services, so you need to be able to do this.
- Being able to offer pertinent advice. Customers often have questions that aren't directly about your products or services but are related to them. Example: When talking about Marketing, I am often asked about designing websites which I do not do, but I need to

understand. The answers you give (or aren't able to give) can influence decisions and how people feel about your customer service.

4) Be cheerful, courteous and respectful.

5) Close the interaction appropriately.

You should finish by actively suggesting a next step. If he or she is ready to make a purchase at this point, be prepared to close the sale immediately. If the customer is not ready to buy or sign a contract at this point, your suggested next step may be a further invitation to engage with the merchandise or service such as, "Is there anything else I can help you with?", "Would you like a brochure or proposal?" You should never just say something such as, "Here you go" or "Okay, then, thanks" and move on.

The Tricky Part of Customer Service?

I know it's basic, but providing good customer service **is** basic. The tricky part of it is providing good customer service to all your customers all the time.

Maria L. Novak Dugan is president of Marketing Solutions & Business Development, a firm in West Chester, PA, offering creative marketing services and goal implementation for small & medium sized businesses. For more information, contact Maria at 610-405-0633 or MariaNovak001@yahoo.com or visit www.Maria-L-Novak.com