

Would your customers recommend you time after time? If not, your customer service needs to improve

The goal as a company is to have customer service that is not just the best but legendary.
Sam Walton, Founder of Wal-Mart



Customer service is, to customers, one of the most visible and significant aspects of their perceptions of the organisation. It will shape their opinions and will often be the differentiator even above pure price. For customers the quality of customer service determines whether to buy, and particularly whether to remain a customer.

Ask yourself the following questions:-

1. Are you confident that your customers would receive “class leading” service on every occasion that they engage with you?
2. Are you confident that no matter how they contact you (in person, on line, by phone) that they will get that same “class leading” service?
3. And are you confident that would apply no matter who in your business dealt with the customer?
4. Does each person within your business have an absolute passion to be the very best that they can be?
5. Does your culture empower each individual to take personal responsibility for everything that they do?
6. Do you regularly talk to your customers in person?
7. Are your customer satisfaction scores regularly increasing?
8. Do you have a process that makes it easy for customers to complain?
9. Do you have a thorough review program for all complaints received?
10. And are you confident that changes implemented have the desired effect?

If you answered NO to any of the above questions, your customer service needs to improve

YOUR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION DIRECTLY IMPACTS YOUR BOTTOM LINE

The premier American research consultancy TARP, have revealed that 68% of customers that defect, do so because they feel poorly treated. It is also accepted that customer new business acquisition is five times more expensive than customer retention.

To break even alone on marketing spend, you will need to find 340 new customers for every 100 that defect and where the reason is poor service...Your marketing budget is to grow your business and not to plug the holes!

The White House Office for Consumer Affairs highlight that up to 70% of customers who complain to you will do business with you again if you resolve their problem, furthermore if they feel you acted quickly and to their satisfaction, up to 96% will do business with you again, and they will probably refer other people to you.

In the UK, Barclaycard state that the longest time UK's shoppers are prepared to queue is two minutes, down from five minutes only six years ago! Two thirds of UK customers have walked away from buying something because they weren't prepared to wait.

To compound the problem, only 3% of consumers believe that UK high street retailers offer great customer service states the "Retail Eyes Report".

In summary, it's apparent that poor service is by far the biggest reason for lost business while loyalty can be generated and customer referrals gained where complaints are handled in the right way and with speed. To compound the issue, expectations are rising.

To be able to offer class leading service, UK service provider John Timpson believes in a "bottom up" policy where each of its UK retail shops has all the autonomy and resources to run the business in such a way that they never need to refer customers to their Head Office...Everything resolved at source and every time.



To change your service offering starts with you and may well require a change in your staff behaviors. By providing them with the skills but more importantly the belief that they can become best in class will have a positive impact on your bottom line.

A robust complaints policy that allows all complaints received to be handled professionally, fairly and with fast customer response times will boost your customer loyalty while highlighting other areas for improvement within your business.



FIVE BASIC TIPS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

1. **Your customers know more about your business than you...Or at least what happens at the “sharp end”.** Find time to speak to them and give them what they want and NOT what you think they want!
2. **Exceed your customer expectation ...Your future rests with keeping your customers happy.** How can you differentiate yourself from the competition? Consider the following:
 - What can you give customers that they cannot get elsewhere?
 - What can you give customers that is totally unexpected?
 - How will your customers remember you?
 - How do you want to be remembered?
3. **Be a good listener.** Take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really saying. Listen to their words, tone of voice, body language, and most importantly, how they feel. Beware of making assumptions.
4. **Don't be afraid to apologize.** Deal with problems immediately and let customers know what you have done. Make it simple for customers to complain. Value their complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve.
5. **Develop your own “great place to work” culture.** If your staff are happy and comfortable in the environment they work in then you will see the benefits. Make your staff feel valued and watch them value your customers.



About the Author: **Nick Bishop**

Nick is a highly experienced Manager with a successful background in the Financial Services and Insurance Industries in both Sales and Service and is respected for his ability to build winning and motivated teams using consummate people handling skills

Nick regularly speaks at customer service events and conferences including local government forums and Contact Centre bodies. Nick was asked to be a judge at the UK Customer Service Training awards in London and has already been invited back for 2013.

Nick delivers programs for Business Management Training Group Ltd and developed and delivers the BMTG UK Accredited **Advanced Certificate for Customer Service Excellence (ACCSE™)**