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12 Easy Steps to Improve Your Customer Service



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12 Easy Steps to Improve Your Customer Service

By Tom Moore

Trucking companies exist to serve customers. It's that simple. They're what got you into business in the first place and they're the reason—the only reason—you stay. Customers are more important to your business than any investor, executive or team member.

You might have the most professional drivers. The best-looking equipment. The most advanced technology. But it would all go naught without a customer to book a load.

Even the most loyal customers choose who they do business with, so it's imperative that a customer service mantra govern your every thought, word and deed. Exceeding the customer's expectations every day, in every way, must become a way of life.

Fortunately, opportunities to improve customer service exist in every fleet. This white paper is designed to provide owners, managers, supervisors and trainers in any trucking company with tools to:

- Develop strategies to move closer to your customers and understand—truly understand—their needs.
- Provide your customers with a solution—not just a service.
- Create intimacy with customers by doing something no one else can do.
- Make your services inspirational and aspirational.
- Measure, assess and improve price by serving as an agent for your customer.
- Customize your service to fit the customer's needs.
- Tap into the talents and insights of your employees (not to mention those of your customers).

Introduction

Wayne Gretzky, when asked what made him the best hockey player of all time, responded that he skated not to where the puck was, but to where it was going to be.

That same sense of anticipation, vision, focus and skill should govern the way all businesses interact with their customers and prospective customers.

Unfortunately, too many take the easy way out and skate to where customers are instead of determining where they're going.

Too many businesses don't even do a good job of understanding where (or who) their customers are. Instead, they get caught up in the self-absorbed proposition of pushing the features of their service without fully understanding the benefits to the customer or prospect. Or they concentrate on getting the job done without much regard to the effect on customers.

Take the current obsession with on-time deliveries. Many a trucking company has misinterpreted its shipper's needs. If on time was good, then early was better, they reasoned. The only problem was that without checking with the shipper or the receiver, they unwittingly created more inventory congestion and staging issues—and unhappy customers.

Highly effective and profitable operations understand that the value of their service is defined solely by the shipper. After all, customers are the ones who keep score and their score is the one that matters. If what you're doing doesn't measure up, they'll take their business someplace else—you can't challenge the call and you won't hear "upon further review." Plain and simple, your service must meet the shipper's or receiver's needs at a specific time and price.

Attributes of Excellent Customer Service

While there are numerous ways to meet and exceed the needs of your customer, they can be boiled down to five attributes:

- **Ability**—Your ability to deliver not just quality service at reasonable price, but your knowledge, trust, competence and confidence. Think Federal Express. Is there any ambiguity about who they say they are and who their customers say they are?
- **Accessibility**—How easy is it to do business with you? The physical appearance of your facility, clean vehicles, clean uniforms, professional phone manners and even the way your website promotes your service all add up to a customer's perception of excellence. Your bills of lading, invoices and other written communications also leave an impression about the quality of your service. What do yours say?
- **Reliability**—The ability to provide what you promise, dependably and accurately. When you deliver a customer's shipment on time, every time, without hassles, you demonstrate reliability.

- **Flexibility**—The ability to change—and to anticipate change—in order to accommodate shifting customer needs or priorities. Successful fleets today are able to respond quickly to meet their customers' changing needs.
- **Affability**—The degree of caring and individualized attention you show customers and the warm feeling customers get when they do business with you. By being sensitive to each customer's needs and treating them as individuals, you convey a sense of empathy. Calling customers to let them know their load has been delayed and will arrive later than expected is a great way to show empathy.

Steps to Improve Excellent Customer Service

To develop and enhance your competitive edge, you must constantly enhance the quality of your customer's experience. The following steps will help you develop a competitive advantage.

1. Know your customer.

Really get to know them. Get intimate with them. Understand the way they make decisions. What their big issues are. How to solve their problems.

Carriers often try to improve service by focusing on internal processes without first asking their shippers what service attributes are most important to them. Without customer guidance, it's easy to spend resources in the wrong places.

A service-minded operation prides itself on systematically listening to what customers have to say. Because if you don't really know your customers, how can you know what they value? And if you don't give them what they value, they'll soon take their business elsewhere.

Leading fleets develop excellent customer relationships by uncovering a latent or unmet need by asking a lot of questions. The point is to determine:

- What are your shippers' business goals and objectives?
- What critical success factors have they defined for their business?
- What are your shippers' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
- What are the problems they need help solving?
- What would make their lives easier?
- How do they serve their market?
- Who are your shippers' customers?
- Who are their competitors?

There are other questions worthy of discussion in Step 2.

2. Ask about your performance.

Gains in customer service come from defining the key results your customers expect and establishing a mutually agreed-upon measurement system to track progress. These must link to your customers' needs, not as you perceive them, but as customers themselves have told you.



Getting shipper feedback can take many forms from relatively inexpensive, do-it-yourself methods to more in-depth, expensive and sophisticated methods that may require input from market research professionals. Here are some methods to consider.

- **Transaction-Based Surveys:** These surveys should be conducted as soon as possible after a service interaction to measure a customer's perception of the experience while it's still fresh in his mind. For example, your transportation group might call traffic managers the day they receive deliveries from you to ask questions such as:
 - Was the delivery on time?
 - Did you receive everything you expected?
 - Was the vehicle clean and in good working condition?
 - Did the driver appear professional in a clean, crisp uniform?
 - Was the driver courteous?
 - Was the driver knowledgeable about your receiving procedures?
 - Was the cargo damage-free?
 - How can our service be improved?

This information can help identify specific problems in your operation. And when a problem surfaces, you can quickly employ corrective action before it becomes serious.

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In addition, this information helps you “sweat the details”. You can point out to your drivers, dispatchers and other service personnel small changes in behavior that can have a major positive impact on the way customers perceive your transportation service.

- **Total Market Surveys:** Although less frequent and much broader in scope than transaction-based surveys, these measure shippers’ overall assessment of your company’s service based on accumulated experiences. This type of survey covers customers’ service expectations and perceptions, the relative importance of service dimensions, and customers’ intentions to repurchase or their willingness to recommend your services. The results establish benchmarks to determine if your service quality is improving.
- **Employee Surveys:** Internal team members can also be a vital source of service quality information. Because drivers, dispatchers and salespeople deal with shippers every day, they have firsthand knowledge of customer experiences with your operation. In addition, information gathered from call reports, questionnaires, shop repair orders, cargo claims and bills of lading can all help:
 - ❑ Reinforce themes from other customer research, validating their urgency.
 - ❑ Put a different slant on customer data, because employees report on what they see and hear.
 - ❑ Identify areas for improvement (for example, dispatchers may identify a piece of necessary information about a customer’s operation that isn’t on their computer screens.)
 - ❑ Identify competitive information.

Keep in mind that everyone should be listening effectively and sharing what he or she hears. The more people in your company who have access to the customer (and, ideally, the freight customer should be visible to everyone in your company), the more information you’ll have to work with.

No matter what methods you use to collect data about your service quality, you must translate that data into useful information and communicate it to the right people in your fleet. This communication must be frequent, timely and consistent, so results can be used to change behavior, address new market demands and fix problems when it matters most—when you interact with your customers.

3. Set your service standards.

Armed with feedback from your customers, you can determine the appropriate service standards under which you’ll operate.



Base your standards on specific customer criteria and include both hard measures (things that can be counted, timed or observed) and soft measures (opinion-based measures that can only be collected by talking with customers).

Many people believe you can’t measure customer service. Nothing could be further from the truth. You can develop a variety of metrics to cover on-time performance, order accuracy, billing accuracy, emergency and specialized deliveries, even driver courtesy. Whatever measures you determine are important, be sure to validate them with your customers.

The National Private Truck Council recently unveiled its Standards of Fleet Excellence, an in-depth research initiative aimed at helping private fleets understand, translate and enhance their value proposition. A central component of that project helps fleets get their arms around tangible customer service standards. (See www.nptc.org for more information.) “We got into business with a customer service mindset,” one private fleet manager explained. “But it didn’t take us long to start measuring success by the efficiency and expediency to get the job done. That added little value to our customers. Fortunately, we realized that this wasn’t healthy. We’ve had to overlook short-term costs to lay the foundation for long-term customer relationships. Service offerings and service standards are now set by listening to our customers and our employees.”

Everyone in that fleet helps in achieving these goals:

- Customer acquisition—Selling service to new customers.
- Customer enhancement—Building long-term relationships with clients.
- Customer satisfaction—Delivering the service in a way that thrills customers.

Establishing service standards that focus on attributes important to your customers serve as the basis for ongoing dialogue and improvement. To paraphrase management guru Peter Drucker, you can’t manage what you can’t measure.

4. Make customer service a part of your business plan.

Once you nail down what your customer wants and needs and set performance standards, make sure everyone in your organization has a clear vision of those wants and needs.

In transportation, customer service is the foundation for all you do. So, how does customer service fit into the plan? It's generally covered in the cultural or environmental scan as follows:

- The mission statement. Because your mission statement should reflect your primary purpose it ought to focus on exceeding customer service standards. If you can't meet and exceed customer expectations, it doesn't matter how cost-effective you are.
- Who are your customers, both internal and external? Each may require different treatment, but it's critical to identify all customers.
- Where are your customers? What are their demographics?
- What are your customer relationships? Who are the most important ones? How do you deal with them? What are their peculiar needs?
- What do your customers value most about their relationship with you? This is the area that demands the most focus. Don't waste time with things that don't add value to your operation. Remember, it's not what you think, but what your customers think that counts.
- What trends exist in your customers' businesses? If you're to stay ahead of the game, you must be able to anticipate changes in your customer's business. Your customer must understand that you don't like surprises any more than they do, and if you're to be of maximum help to them, you need to be informed of anticipated changes.

A case in point is Sentinel Transportation, a private fleet headquartered in Wilmington, DE, that provides service for DuPont and Conoco. Between the two controlling partners, Sentinel's customer base includes 15 businesses that produce everything from crude oil to specialty chemicals to plastic pellets, out of 43 separate terminal facilities, the largest of which domiciles 26 units. The private fleet serves interplant movements as well as distribution to DuPont and Conoco customers.

In the course of setting its strategic plan, Sentinel compares its current state of operations against its best analysis of what the future might look like. In addition to looking at the competition, outside market forces, financials and internal issues, President Ralph Benson examines the "voice of the criteria." Specifically, he looks at the:

- Selection criteria
- Values
- Satisfaction
- Unmet Needs
- Opportunities
- Willingness to pay

The process helps Benson arrive at a solid understanding of why Sentinel exists in the first place:

- To provide the highest value truck transportation based on customer requirements.
- To provide a related service that outside carriers can't economically provide.
- To help manage the risk of high hazard and service sensitive materials where there's a high consequence of failure.
- To provide marketplace leverage and insight into trucking operations.

That mission keeps Sentinel focused on what it should do and, equally important, what it should not do. "We don't try to be all things to all people," explains Benson. "If you're saying yes, you're saying no somewhere else. It's important to focus on what you do well and walk away from business that doesn't fit the model. That's accomplished by having discipline around your values."

5. Recognize customer service is everyone's job.

Including customer service goals and objectives in your business plan creates awareness in your organization and helps remove some of the barriers that exist in the natural state of business.

Many fleet managers believe the sales and marketing departments have sole responsibility for revenue generation. In reality, everyone must adopt and implement a service-based marketing philosophy. In a customer-focused environment, everyone in the organization has to make decisions based on the impact they'll have on the customer.

The customers most fleets are familiar with are external customers. They're the people who depend on you to haul their freight, providing you revenue. They pay the bills and contribute to the profitability of your company and are the reason for your existence. Their importance is obvious, although it's not always emphasized as it should be.

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However, customers who often go unrecognized are internal customers. There's a remarkably close and consistent link between how internal customers are treated and how external customers perceive the quality of your organization's services. Benjamin Schneider, professor of psychology and business management at the University of Maryland, is well known for his research on how "the people make the place." He notes that a commitment to serve internal customers invariably shows itself to external customers, and that it's almost impossible to provide good external service if your organization is not providing good internal service. Without a commitment to high-quality service inside an organization, service to end-user consumers will surely suffer.

Two decades ago, Jan Carlzon led a remarkable turnaround that brought his company, Scandinavian Airlines System, from an \$8 million loss to a gross profit of \$71 million in less than two years. He didn't resort to new advertising or clever accounting gimmicks. He did it by inspiring an uncompromising focus on the customer at every level of the airline. Part of that focus involved changing the way people within the airline interacted with each other.

If your employees don't feel they're treated well, they won't treat customers well. People can't give what they don't have.

6. Train your workforce.

Once the customer is identified, your job is to ensure their customer service needs are met. How can you expect your employees to handle irate customers well if you've never taught them how to do it? Be perpetually dissatisfied with your level of service. Everyone in your company needs to know unambiguously the level of service they're expected to deliver and to continually look for ways to improve that service.

Every service encounter provides an opportunity for your employees to leave a positive impression on your customers. These encounters provide the opportunity to build trust, increase loyalty, make customers aware of the services you offer and promote quality.

Making customer encounters positive takes a concerted effort on your part. It begins with well-trained employees.

There are five competency areas your fleet staff must be familiar with to provide excellent customer service:

- 1. Service Standards.** Your employees are the direct link to your customers. They must clearly understand the customer service standards set by the company. By knowing these expectations and their rationale, employees have parameters within which to act. Employees must also understand their decision-making authority, and if a problem or request is beyond their scope, they should know whom to contact.
- 2. Technical Skills.** Each group of fleet employees needs to understand the systems and equipment with which they work. They also need to know what to do when systems go down. They should understand the purpose and flow of data, proper forms and procedures.
- 3. Interpersonal Skills.** Employees need to be well trained on listening to, understanding, communicating with and relating to customers. Beyond training, this involves practice and requires patience while they learn.
- 4. Service Knowledge.** Employees should know the technical aspects of the services your company offers. They should be prepared to answer questions most frequently asked and know where to go to for the others.
- 5. Customer Knowledge.** Your employees can never know too much about your customers. This knowledge is a corporate asset. Respect it and make it available.

7. Nurture an environment of empowerment and trust.

Empowerment does not mean telling your employees to do it the best way they can and hope it works out. It means giving your team the responsibility to solve a customer's problem. And it means holding them accountable for their actions.

Here are examples from two sides of the cost-spectrum that illustrate excellent customer service:

One private fleet provides its drivers with chocolate chip cookies to present to dockworkers at the receivers location. This small gesture ensured that his trucks were unloaded first.

Ritz-Carlton Hotels, which has earned pre-eminent status for its customer service reputation, empowers its entire staff—maids and bellmen included—to spend up to \$1,000 to solve customer complaints.

People who have customer contact—and that is really just about everyone if you include internal customers—need to learn the attitudes, strategies and skills of helping, fixing and putting your customers' needs first.

In order for a culture of customer service excellence to grow and thrive, management must have a burning desire for it to be that way and the energy to ensure that this desire spreads throughout the organization and remains there permanently. In becoming a totally customer-focused organization, everyone, from the top down, must believe they work for the customer.

8. Weed out policies and procedures that are customer unfriendly.

Ask yourself how to get rid of barriers to good customer service. Do you offer electronic billing and electronic signature capture that improve accuracy? Do you call your shippers to let them know shipment status? Do you use on-board computers to enable your trucks to be re-routed on the fly and to give your shippers notice when a shipment arrives? Get rid of all unfriendly rules, policies and procedures that stand between you and your customer. Be easy to do business with.

Joan Cannie, in her book *Keeping Customers for Life*, explains 12 obstacles:

1. Company policies that exist for company convenience and control. These do nothing more than inhibit every one's ability to satisfy customers.
2. Job specialization. Seldom is one person given enough broad responsibility and training to handle the needs of the customer. The buck is continually passed around the company.
3. No coordination of the service process. Too often the sales, production, distribution and billing departments function in an uncoordinated fashion, causing delays and miscommunication.
4. Decision-making power is too remote from the customer. Managers who have little contact with customers make decisions without realizing the impact on the customer and the person actually dealing with the customer.
5. Arbitrary service policies. Many times there's little or no flexibility in dealing with problems. The tendency is to force dealing with them as the manual states, with little discretion or latitude. The purpose is to avoid customers being treated differently, when in reality this treats them all poorly.
6. Top priority is on cost containment. This is a myopic view. No consideration is given as to whether the customer will stay or go to the competition. To draw an analogy, consider the boss in Dilbert who says, "If we continue to cut costs, we should be able to show a profit without actually producing anything." You may laugh when you read this, but actions often reflect this convoluted thinking.
7. Indifferent, unmotivated, powerless employees. If employees are not empowered and rewarded for excellent customer service, then their own self-esteem needs are not being met, to the point that they do not really care about the needs of the customer or the benefit to the company.
8. Not enough creative problem solving. It's not enough to satisfy the customer and make them whole financially. Inconvenience and frustration must be addressed in a completely different manner. There's not much book on this. It calls for latitude and discretion at the point of contact.
9. Failure to listen to customers. Just being pleasant is not the end of customer service; it's only the beginning. You have to know what your customers need and want in the way of customer service. And you can't guess. Only they know. You have to ask. And get specifics, not generalities.
10. "Customer service" is only a new name for the "complaint department". Remember, it's not just about fixing problems; it's about preventing them.
11. Frontline contact people are powerless to solve most customers' problems. More than 80% of customer problems are not the fault of the customer service rep, yet they take the heat and don't have the authority and responsibility to make it right.
12. Company dishonesty. There's no other way to put it. Some companies lie to their customers or promise more than can be delivered. The results are disastrous, sometimes to the point of going out of business.

There's always more in the way to stop us from providing excellent service than there is to help us. You must recognize these barriers and do something about them.

9. Recognize the lifetime value of customers.

It's important to understand how your customer adds value to your operation, not just for one transaction, but for the lifetime of your relationship. Understanding that a seemingly small and insignificant \$1,000 shipment repeated weekly for 10 years translates into \$520,000 is bound to change your perception of the value of that customer and the way you treat them.

10. Underpromise and overdeliver.

This is the golden rule of customer service. In today's customer service environment, nothing is more important than managing expectations. That's because perceptions define reality. You have the ability to set and manage those expectations throughout the relationship.

11. Communicate relentlessly.

Be honest with your customers. Honesty isn't just the best policy; it's the only policy. When mistakes are made, admit them, find out what's needed to correct them and do it. Be proactive.

For instance, trucking companies face growing pressure to enhance their service offerings at competitive price levels. A case in point is how Four Truckers, a 120-unit fleet, provides specialized less-than-truckload and dedicated transportation services to furniture retailers in the 10 western states and four western provinces of Canada for more than 300 manufacturers around Morganton, NC.

With \$22 million in sales last year and just more than 200 employees, Four Truckers is "the right size to take care of customers and have personal relationships with our people," says President Eric Clarke.

Clarke credits technology for providing the tools to strengthen those bonds. "To provide the customized and innovative transportation options we offer," he says, "we depend on a number of technologies, including document imaging, mobile communication and radio frequency bar coding and fully integrated real-time shipment tracking."

Similarly, in the service-sensitive private fleet world, tracking assets is critical. One fast food provider dramatically improved its customer service by adopting mobile communications technology in its fleet of 200 power units and 220 trailers. Integrating a GPS-based location tracking system with the company's routing platform makes it possible to locate the right truck and dispatch it in the most efficient manner so stores never run out of product.

Increasingly, more fleets have opened their technology infrastructure to provide transparency for their customers so they can track and monitor shipments. "We equipped our units with mobile communications systems to be able to let our customers know where their loads were, whether they wanted to go on-line or to call us up to find out," says one fleet executive.

12. Engage the customer.

The trucking companies that master customer service attributes understand they deliver more than freight. They provide intangible benefits with high emotional value. Simply put, what a company offers is assessed by their customers for what it does for them (functional benefits) and, more importantly, how they feel about it (emotional benefits).

The more you migrate your customer service from functional to emotional benefits, the greater the value, the loyalty and the margins you'll enjoy. Customer-centric fleets understand that the value of their service is defined solely by the customer. Do it right and you may garner more than just their business.

"Our best customers serve as an extension of our sales force," says the principle of a 65-unit truckload carrier. "They're more than customers. They help us shape our service offerings, determine our technology deployment and recommend our service to their peers because of the way our drivers treat them on the docks."

But it's not solely about selling. Rather, it's about looking to establish strong relationships with a limited number of valued customers. Done properly, that will account for a disproportionate share of revenues, according to David G. Thomson in his recent book, *Blueprint to a Billion*. Based on three years of research, Thomson profiled the DNA of a group of 387 "Blueprint Companies" that, since 1980, went from an initial public offering to achieve \$1 billion in revenue.

"Marquee Customer relationships—like the booster stage on a rocket going into orbit—they supercharge growth," he says. "Marquee Customers are people or companies with such sparkling reputations that their glow extends to whomever they do business with. They give companies credibility and instant status—sort of like having Michael Jordan dropping by your driveway to shoot hoops with you." According to Thomson, these "marquee customers" help companies in three ways:

1. They test and deploy the service. If it's deficient, they'll say why and if it's good, they'll place an order.
2. They co-develop the value proposition. They can tell you if your value proposition is good for them, regardless of how good it seems to you. They'll also tell you how to shape it to maximize its value.
3. They serve as a reference and sell to peers. Like a lighthouse, they draw attention to up-and-coming companies by offering recommendations and references to their peers, as you would tip a friend off to a good painter or plumber.





Conclusion

According to customer service gurus Fred Crawford and Ryan Mathews, customers are looking for deeper levels of personal recognition and a clear statement of values. Yet their pleas are going largely unheeded by the business community. Human values, not commercial values, have become today's currency of commerce. The critical elements of a transaction, whether it's business-to-business or business-to-consumer, aren't capital, goods and services. They're human qualities of the people or companies exchanging those elements.

To exceed your customers' expectations, don't focus exclusively on the value of each transaction. Rather, nurture relationships. By centering your attention on solving your customer's unique challenges, you will be able to increase the value of the relationship.

The ability to see your business through the customer's eyes and to align and conduct your business on terms your customers find meaningful will determine your value to your customer and, ultimately, your success.

Tom Moore is a freelance writer, speaker, trainer and consultant with more than 25 years of experience in the trucking industry. Before starting his own strategic communications business, he worked for the American Trucking Association (ATA), the National Private Truck Council (NPTC), Fleet Owner magazine, and Randall Publishing. He can be reached at thomas.l.moore@att.net or 203-241-6247.

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Customer Service Quiz

It's one thing to gain more customers. But what are you doing to retain those you already have? Take this quiz developed by Valerie Sikolosky, principle at Valerie & Company (www.valericandcompany.com), a leadership consultancy in Dallas and long-time author of a column in Southwest Airlines in-flight magazine, to see how well you understand what to do.

Pick the best answer for each question and compare them to the answers at the end of this article.

1) If you want to maximize the profitability of customer relationships, you should begin with:

- a) New customers
- b) Customers who have left or are considering leaving
- c) Customers who are angry

2) According to research by Technical Assistance Research Programs, an unhappy customer talks about the negative experience to:

- a) 30 other people
- b) 25 other people
- c) 20 other people

3) Empathizing means:

- a) Identifying with the complainer
- b) Telling the person you understand
- c) Offering to make things right

4) Managers who believe in empowering employees should understand that employees:

- a) Must be carefully tracked
- b) Usually make excellent decisions
- c) Need regular training

5) If you want to see how your department or company handles unhappy customers, a good marketing idea is to:

- a) Have a friend call and complain
- b) Listen to a front-line employee when dealing with a customer
- c) Schedule meetings to regularly ask how complaints are handled

6) A survey about why customers stop buying reveals that one of the main reasons is:

- a) They don't sense they are valued
- b) They are looking for cheaper services
- c) They have no personal relationship with the company

7) When your customer expresses concerns about an aspect of your service, you should:

- a) Ask for details
- b) Ask what else you can do to help
- c) Ask the customer to be a part of a focus group with other concerned customers

8) To track those customers who may be close to leaving, it might be helpful to:

- a) Institute an exception reporting system
- b) Alert management about dissatisfied customers
- c) Walk among the customers

9) As you aim to strengthen customer relationships, you should:

- a) Constantly analyze their changing needs
- b) Stay in touch monthly
- c) Regularly ask for service suggestions

10) The least costly, most profitable collection tactic for overdue payments is:

- a) Firmly telling the customer the amount must be collected immediately
- b) Rewarding the collector who consistently gets customers to pay on time
- c) Giving positive reinforcement for those customers who honor their agreements

Answers on page 10.

Answers to Quiz

Each correct answer is worth 10 points. If your score is 80-100 you have a great sense of appreciation for your customers and are likely winning more every day. A score of 60-70 means you're closely aligned with your customers and treat them as you'd like to be treated as a customer. A score below 60 indicates you need to start thinking about what you could do to create more positive encounters for your customers.

1. B. If you contact customers who have shown reason to leave or are former customers, you can find what drove them away in the first place and perhaps win them back by showing that you care.
2. C. While 95% of unhappy customers won't complain directly to someone who can do something to improve the situation, about 13% will spread their negativity to an average of 20 other people.
3. A. The definition of empathy is "the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feeling, thought, or attitudes of another." That doesn't say the other person is right or that you feel sorry for the customer. It's knowing that feelings come first.
4. B. When given the authority to do what's best without having to check with the supervisor, the employee more often than not will interact effectively with the customer.
5. A. Ask someone to call or write with a complaint or do it yourself. By going through a typical customer experience you can see how it's handled.
6. A. This survey by the Wisconsin Restaurant Assn. stated that 65% of customers sense sellers' indifferent attitudes. Giving attention can mean sending regular notices, keeping in touch, telephone calls.
7. B. You're in an ideal position to leverage that dialogue by asking what else you can do to help. What you learn about handling one need may lead to solving others, as well.
8. A. Implement a system that will alert you when accounts show unusual changes in activity. Look for links between voluntary and involuntary account closures. Determine customer patterns ahead of time and proactively respond to their issues.
9. A. When you solicit enduring, long-term relationships with customers, your continuing aim should be to deepen and strengthen your ties. The more needs you meet, the deeper will be your customers' reliance on your business partnership.
10. C. Take time to contact customers who are maintaining their accounts in good order. Positive reinforcement builds long-term customer relationships.



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Customer Service Ratings Worksheet

The following worksheet can help you assess the organizational state of customer service and determine where improvement's needed.

	Excellent	Good	Poor
Job knowledge. Understand products, services and customer service procedures. You don't have to ask someone down the hall how to do it or look it up in a procedure manual while the customer is waiting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow up. You deliver on promises and commitments made to your customers. Always. If you promise to call, you do it. If you promise to give the customer more information, you do it. If you don't have that information by the time you promised to get back to them, you call the customer to tell them. And you keep giving updates until you finally get the needed information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication. You can clearly express yourself. Customers understand what you're trying to tell them. You don't use a lot of two-dollar words or technical jargon. You communicate in the customer's language, not yours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrity. You adhere to high social and ethical standards. This means no stealing from the company, even an occasional pad of paper or pencil. It means knowing all the ethical ramifications of your business and following them to the letter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivation to serve customers. You derive satisfaction from meeting and exceeding customer needs. You really enjoy serving and helping customers—even the irate ones.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work standards. You constantly strive to meet high standards of customer service. And when you reach your goals, you strive even higher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer sensitivity. You show concern for the way customers feel, not just what they say. You can empathize with customer concerns and are good at reading between the lines, to what the customer isn't saying, but is feeling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Energy. You remain alert and attentive and work with high energy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decisiveness. You never say, "That's not my job." You're willing to take action to address customer needs. You know your boundaries, though, and don't overstep them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resilience. You're able to handle job-related pressures when serving the customer. You are able to bounce back and take it professionally, not personally, when a customer "dumps" on you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Judgment. You use all available information, previous experience and training to address customer needs. You know when to give and when to stand your ground to customer demands.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

