

The 10 Commandments of Exceptional Customer Service:
150 Ideas for Improving Service
by Mark Sanborn
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Introduction

1

"He profits most who serves best."

Arthur Frederick Sheldon

Is the level of service you provide better, the same or worse than it was one year ago? If you're not getting better, you're getting left behind.

2

Marketing creates demand.
Selling creates transactions.
Service creates customers.

What keeps buyers coming back? The relationship they have with you and your company. All products and services are differentiated by the quality of the relationship between the buyer and the seller. Service is about relationship building with customers.

3

The *ultimate* objective of a business is profit. The *primary* purpose of a business is to create customers. Profitability without customers is an impossibility.

4

"In the quest for success, just remember that there is no substitute for character or service."

Henry David Thoreau

5

Customers do you a favor by choosing to do business with you. You aren't doing them a favor by serving them.

6

You need your customers just as much as they need you. And you may need them *more*. After all, they could go elsewhere to get what they need.

7

Customers should never feel like outsiders. They should be treated like insiders.

8

Serving a customer isn't an interruption or inconvenience. It is the whole point and purpose of doing business.

9

Always remember that customers pay your salary!

10

The First Commandment: Customers have the gold, therefore they make the rules (also known as The Golden Rule of Customer Service).

11

"If I had to come up with a universal law of business, I'd say that every organization needs to have a few critical areas of focus that are not subject to compromise."

Leonard Schlesinger

12

Do you ever compromise on service? Do you cut corners, only partially fill or even forget commitments? Exceptional service means keeping every commitment you make to customers. Period.

13

The Profit Impact of Market Strategy research shows that financial performance is tied directly to the perceived quality of a company's goods and services.

14

No customer should ever have to choose between competency and courtesy.

15

"Your customer service attitude is contagious. What are your customers catching?"

Lisa Ford

16

Think C.A.R.E.-Customers Are Really Everything

17

Every customer wants to feel important, appreciated and valued.

18

"Success comes one customer at a time. Keep and work to regain customer allegiance!"
Linda Goldzimmer

19

Everyone who has contact with customers must be a C.S.P.: customer service professional.

20

At retail superstar Wal-Mart, every associate takes a pledge--"I solemnly promise and declare that every customer that comes within ten feet of me, I will smile, look them in the eye, and greet them, so help me Sam." (Sam Walton, the company founder)

21

"Examine your service policies to see if they are based on the actions of your problem customers...or are they based on the actions of the 99-plus percent who are good, honest people?"
Don Shapiro

22

Don't penalize the majority because of the minority by treating good customers like problem customers.

23

The Second Commandment: Service is created from the inside out; those who are not well served do not serve well.

24

"If you don't treat your own people well, they won't treat other people well."
Herb Kelleher, CEO
Southwest Airlines

25

"The way management treats the associates is exactly how the associates will then treat the customers. And if the associates treat the customers well, the customers will return again and again, and that is where the real profit in this business lies."

Sam Walton
Wal-Mart founder

26

"In a service business, you have to remember that your major assets take the elevator down every night, and you hope they come back in the morning."

Samuel Hayes
Harvard Business School

27

Employees are the best service guarantee.

28

"If you're not serving the Customer, you'd better be serving someone who is."

Jan Carlzon

29

Total Quality Management definition of customer: The next person in the process.

30

Treat coworkers as internal customers.

31

There are no "paper pushers." Realize that whenever you make a mistake on the paper work, you give a living, breathing human being somewhere an ulcer. Every employee is important.

32

Think of your entire company as a team of customer service professionals.

33

Your team's success is jeopardized by anyone who is not committed to service.

34

TEAM stands for together everyone accomplishes more.

35

You can't win together by competing against each other. Teams win through cooperation.

36

To better serve *external* customers, ask *internal* customers:
"What can I do to help you serve our customers better?"

37

The Third Commandment: Look at everything through your customer's eyes.

38

"Quality and service are what the customer say they are."
Motto at Techsonic

39

"It's not enough to be close to the customer. You've got to be glued to the customer."
Tom Peters

40

Customers want things fast.

The only thing a customer has less of than disposable income is disposable time.

41

Customers like convenience.

Ask yourself, "Who adjusts?" Do we force our customers to adjust to our needs, or do we adjust to their needs?

42

One size doesn't fit all.

Treat different customers differently: customers like options.

43

Customers need guidance.

Here's the paradox: even though they like options, too many options overwhelm them. They also need guidance; someone to say, "Based on your options, this is what is best for you."

44

Customers want a pleasant experience.

The pleasure of the experience is as important as the price of the product.

45

You never really know for sure how your customer wants to be treated unless you ask.

46

The Platinum Rule of Customer Service: Do unto customers as they want to be done unto.

47

Flight attendant: "Sir, would you like the chicken or the beef for dinner?"

Passenger: "Which do you recommend?"

Flight attendant: "Neither. I don't eat this food."

Question: Does the flight attendant not eat the food because it is bad, or is the food bad because the flight attendant doesn't eat it? When you don't use your own products or services, you lose touch with the customer's experience.

48

To understand your customer's experience, use your own products and services.

49

"After all the standards are met, we have fun. We make clothes to satisfy us.
We wear them." from Patagonia's catalog

50

The Fourth Commandment: Go beyond satisfying the customer.

51

"Render more service than that for which you are paid and you will soon be paid
for more than you render." Napoleon Hill

52

After every interaction, the customer is:

1. Disappointed: they got less than they expected.
2. Satisfied: they got only what they expected.
3. Delighted: they got more than they expected.

53

To delight customers, provide a little bit more than expected.

54

If you only do what other service providers do, you'll never be better than they
are. Aim higher.

55

Delighted customers come back, spend more and tell others.

56

In 1955 Walt Disney spoke of exceeding the customer's expectations. For the
past several decades, successful people and organizations have committed
themselves to doing it.

57

For customers, loyalty is the lack of a better alternative.

58

Keep your promises. As comedian Flip Wilson's Geraldine says:

"Don't let your mouth write a check your body can't cash."

59

"Between 65-85% of the customers who defect say they were satisfied with their former supplier."
Frederick Reichheld

60

"The only certain means of success is to render more and better service than is expected of you, no matter what your task may be." Og Mandino

61

You don't have to delight everybody to be successful, but you must delight somebody.

What would happen if everyone in your organization made it a point to delight at least one customer each day? The answer: your organization would be legendary.

62

The Fifth Commandment: Add value to every transaction.

63

"Value" is the total package of all those things your customer prizes and appreciates when they do business with you.

64

Those who provide the most value at the best price win biggest.

65

These things create value for customers:

- nicer (courtesy)
- more (quantity)
- better (quality)
- faster (speed)
- different (creativity)
- less expensive (price)
- funner (enjoyment)

66

"The major lesson that was learned in the past decade, still in process but begun by so many people: you can't add values unless you have values."

Paul Hawken

67

On a flight to Orlando, the enterprising steward put on a Goofy cap and invited the children to join him in the front of the cabin where he did magic tricks for them. A flight attendant on the same flight sat on the floor with a child in her lap, giving the frazzled parent a needed break from childcare.

68

At Crested Butte Mountain Ski Resort, an employee repaired a skier's disabled car in the parking lot. Another used his own permit to cut a tree after work so a family that was staying at the resort would have a Christmas tree for their holiday vacation.

69

A cable installer in southern California does more than just install cable service. He programs the remote switcher for the new channels, sets the timer on the VCR and often improves sound quality by repositioning the stereo antenna and speakers.

70

A friend went to the movie theater and forgot her wallet. She asked an employee if she could write a check. She was told not to worry about it. Just drop the money off the next time she was nearby. After she got her seat, the same employee bought a box of popcorn and a soft drink. Now how often does she go to that movie theater? Every chance she gets.

71

The Sixth Commandment: Convert complaints into commitment.

72

"Complaints offer opportunities to make friends or to make enemies...Isn't it worthwhile to exert every effort to turn complainers into boosters?"

B.C. Forbes

73

An unhappy customer will tell more people about his or her negative experience than a happy customer will about his or her positive experience.

74

Most customers won't complain to *you*. But they will tell others if they're unhappy. Seek out unhappy customers and you'll profit from your efforts.

75

Excellent service providers still make mistakes. But what makes them different is how they recover.

76

A sincere apology is the first step in dealing with a customer complaint.

77

Explain why something happened, but don't make an excuse. An excuse is a relinquishment of responsibility. Customers want action, not excuses.

78

Don't blame others. It may not be your fault that the customer had a problem, but it is always your responsibility to get it fixed.

79

As quickly as possible, find out what needs to be done to regain the customer's loyalty.

80

Fixing what's wrong isn't enough. Find a way to compensate the customer for his or her inconvenience. *Do more than necessary* to make the customer happy.

81

"Be a problem solver, not a problem evader. We train people to be angry when we fail to be available when they are just concerned." Dr. Terry Paulson

82

The best policy for getting employees to take care of customers? "You'll never get in trouble trying to help a customer."

83

When a customer is unhappy and complaining, listen carefully.

84

"He who answers before listening--that is his folly and his shame."

Proverbs 18:13

85

The Seventh Commandment: Make contact with customers positively memorable.

86

I met a woman at a party who was a flight attendant of an airline I fly frequently.

Me: "Maybe we've been on the same flight before and didn't know it."

Her: "Oh no. If you were on a flight I had been working, it would have been a positively memorable experience."

87

"Perception is reality." Tom Peters

88

A moment of truth occurs whenever a customer forms a perception of your business. You've got to manage those moments of truth.

89

What perceptions do your customers form when:

- They call your organization?
- They receive correspondence?
- They ask a question?
- They see your facilities?
- They evaluate the appearance of your employees?
- After they've done business with you.

90

Little things make a big difference. How many times does the phone ring before it is answered? How long are customers kept on hold? Is there follow-up to make sure every commitment made to a customer is kept?

91

An hour of brilliant service can be undone by a minute of indifference.

92

Don't forget to say thank you.

93

In one study, there was a 27% increase in future sales when people were called after a purchase. People react more positively to a call simply thanking them for their business than to calls thanking them and telling of an upcoming sale.

94

The Eighth Commandment: Make your customer a partner.

95

Involvement creates commitment.

96

Southwest Airlines involves their frequent flyers in the process of hiring flight attendants. They've gone beyond customer involvement to a level of customer intimacy.

97

A customer feels empowered when they know they have been heard and what they've said will make a difference.

98

Find out how you're doing.
You'll never really know how well your customers are being served until you ask them.

99

Is the level of service you provide today better than it was last year? Last quarter? Last week? Have you asked your customers if they think you're getting better or worse?

100

Three questions you need to ask your customers:

1. What did you like most about doing business with us?
2. What did you like least about doing business with us?
3. What will you tell others about your experience (doing business with us)?

101

The Ninth Commandment: No matter how good your service gets, keep making it better.

102

"The best isn't and good enough never is."

Debbie Fields

103

The Tattered Cover bookstore in Denver, Colorado, is one of the premier bookstores in the world. Its customer newsletter provides a list of services: books by phone, mailing of book purchases anywhere in the world, special ordering, book catering for meetings, conferences and book fairs, gift certificates, store charges and evening hours. Here's what is listed as free: covered parking (clerks validate the parking ticket), gift-wrapping, toll free numbers, browsing, overstuffed chairs and story hour.

104

Doubletree Hotel brings two freshly baked chocolate chip cookies to your room at the end of the day you checked in.

105

Every seat on Midwest Express flights is a "first-class" seat in size and comfort.

106

Identify the best service providers in your community and visit them to observe how they do it.

107

Create a customer service library at your company of the best books, audiotapes, videos and interactive media.

108

Invite a customer to speak at your next staff meeting. Ask them to suggest ways to improve your service.

109

Start a program called "Service Idea of the Week." Ask your service team members to submit ideas and then select the best to share.

110

The Tenth Commandment: Honor thy customer (but humor thyself).

111

I asked one of my early mentors the secret of being successful in business. His advice was direct:

1. Be willing to put up with your customer's grief. Business is about being paid to deal with other people's problems.
2. Remember what I tell my salespeople: They have my permission to tell a customer where to go--as long as they hang up the phone first!

112

The big lie: the customer is always right.

The reality: sometimes the Customer is rude, demanding or wrong...
...but, the customer is always one thing:

The Customer

113

Definition of customer: someone who has paid to be treated with dignity and respect whether or not they deserve it.

114

It's easy to be nice to nice customers? The challenge is to be nice to customers who aren't.

115

Treat difficult customers as a challenge. See if you can convert them with kindness.

116

Your commitment must be to care for customers even when they're not right.

117

Take your work very seriously but don't take yourself too seriously.

118

According to a Sioux Indian saying, the first thing people say after their death is, "Why was I so serious?"

119

"The next best thing to solving a problem is finding some humor in it."
Frank A. Clark

120

There is absolutely no reason not to have fun when serving customers.

121

Beyond Customer Service: *The Service Ethic.*

122

I grew up in a small farming community in northeastern Ohio. Nobody had ever been to a customer service seminar, or probably even read a book about it. But when you needed help, your neighbors gave you a hand. If you were sick, they brought you food. If there was a tragedy, they were there to support you. They understood something more important than the concept of customer service. They lived by the service ethic.

123

Customer Service: Serving *customers* well because it is the *profitable* thing to do.
The Service Ethic: Serving *everyone* well because it is the *right* thing to do.

124

"Service is the rent you pay for being."

Marian Wright Edelman

125

"When you cease to make a contribution you begin to die."

Eleanor Roosevelt

126

"The human contribution is the essential ingredient. It is only in the giving of oneself to others that we truly live."

Ethel Percy Andrus

127

"No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

Calvin Coolidge

128

"Helping others isn't about mere sacrifice. Service to others is giving of yourself without bragging about your contribution."

Scott McKain

129

Commit to service.

130

The Service Professional

131

The service professional works with pride.

What you do is critically important. Other people--coworkers, customers, or management--should never make you feel unimportant because of their poor attitude. Do the kind of work you can rightfully feel proud about.

132

The service professional is positive.

Focus on the positive, not the negative. Sure, problems exist, but

customers don't need to hear them rehearsed and rehashed.

133

The service professional is creative.

Are you doing what everybody else does, or do you bring fresh thinking to your work?

134

The service professional is a problem solver.

Anybody can solve easy problems. How good are you at solving the difficult ones?

135

The service professional is a people person.

If you don't enjoy people--and aren't able to make your customers feel that you do--you've picked the wrong job.

136

The service professional acts professionally.

A professional does their best even when he or she doesn't feel like it.

137

The service professional is a team player.

Superior service is a team support. Just as you need to be supported by coworkers to serve your customers, you need to support them as well.

138

The service professional aims to exceed expectations.

Superior service stands out. Make it your goal to provide better service to your customers than you've ever received yourself.

139

The service professional is committed to getting better.

Look for new and better ways to serve. Add to your service arsenal every day.

140

The Questions for your team to review and discuss regularly:

141

Who is our customer?

142

Who do we want our customers to be?

143

What are the most important things we know about our customer?

144

Are we utilizing our cumulative expertise to get glued to customers?

145

What do our customers expect?

146

What do our customers want?

147

Do we consistently meet and exceed expectations?

148

What service levels will give us a relative edge over our competitors?

149

How well do we solve the problems that our customers experience?

Are we consistently improving our overall service quality?

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