

ARE YOU A CUSTOMER SERVICE “HAVE” OR “HAVE NOT”?



Chérie V. Petersen
Distance Education Program Coordinator



Institute for
Learning

As a customer, what do you find most irritating when dealing with people who are supposed to be providing you customer service?

- People who don't bother to say "thank you."
- When people continue their conversation with a co-worker as they are answering the phone or when a customer walks in.
- Rudeness.
- Getting a long answer when a short one would do the job.
- Being made to look stupid in front of others.
- No one around to help you.
- Having to hear about the challenges of doing their job; essentially, people complaining about how difficult their job is or the "stuff" they have to put up with.
- Not being organized.
- Being interrupted while you are talking.
- Hearing employees talking about other patients/customers.
- Failing to understand what's needed or what the issue is.
- People who don't smile.
- Dealing with someone who is rigid and unwilling to be flexible.
- Feeling rushed because it seems the person has more important things to do than deal with you.
- People who act like you don't matter.
- When you are on the phone or talking with someone in person, and you don't feel like you are receiving his/her full attention.



- Being lectured.
- People who jump to a conclusion about what you are talking about or in need of without letting you finish your explanation.
- People who are loud and not very discrete.
- The tone in someone's voice that suggests he/she doesn't care, isn't interested, or is just trying to get rid of you.
- People who don't have a clue about how to solve a problem and, even worse, don't bother to try.
- When people complain about how busy they are because they're having to pick up the slack for others, so they essentially throw their co-workers under the bus.
- An expression on someone's face that says: "I wish you would just leave. I want to go back to doing nothing like I was before you came!"
- When you feel like you are being talked down to, as if you are stupid because you may not understand the jargon someone is using.
- Being told that you can't have what you think you should get because of a policy someone doesn't even seem to have a good explanation for.
- People who don't know anything about the business they represent, essentially making themselves useless to you.
- Sensing that you are being redirected to someone else simply because the person you are currently dealing with doesn't seem to want to help you.

Just to mention a few!



Now, how daring (or honest with yourself) are you willing to be? Look back over the list and put a check mark by the ones you have done as a customer service provider.

So what does it all mean? What are the key elements, *from a customer's perspective*, of great customer service?

Attitude Tone Friendliness
Helpfulness Respect Ownership

Attitude

- Yours, not the customer's!
 - Many customer service providers buy into the idea that the customer's attitude dictates how they respond to the customer. Unfortunately, this *is* typically what happens; if the customer is negative, then so is the provider and vice versa. But what should happen is that regardless of the customer's attitude, the provider's attitude remains positive, helpful, and upbeat.
- Own your attitude.
 - Attitude is a choice you make, and you are the only one who stands in the way of having a positive outlook.
- Choose positive words and interactions.
 - Choose positive words and participate only in actions that have positive outcomes. Choose to be a role model for positive thinking and behavior.
 - Having a positive attitude allows for and promotes the caring consideration of others; it is critical to successful customer interactions.
 - Carry yourself in such a way that you raise the positivity quotient of any environment of which you are a part.



Tone

- Tone is 38 percent of understanding.
 - Tone of voice represents 38 percent of understanding during the communication process. Have you ever heard: “It’s not WHAT you said, but HOW you said it”? Of course you have! It’s something your parents probably said to you as a kid more often than they care to remember! Tone can completely change the intended meaning of words.
 - Tone is what often indicates the emotional disposition of the person talking.
 - The three components of communication are: content, tone, and body language. Content represents 7 percent; tone, 38 percent; and body language, 55 percent. Body language also contributes to the perceived tone and disposition. Those two components combined add up to 93 percent. Wow, that’s something to really think about!
- Put a smile in your voice, and on your face.
 - As trite as that sounds, it changes the nature of your tone and uses body language as a booster.



Friendliness

- Nobody likes a grouch.
 - This is especially true when people are shelling out their hard-earned money and expect to be treated with at least a baseline of kindness, and perhaps even some enthusiasm, for bringing you their business.
 - Grouchiness is contagious and tends to suck the life out of everything and everyone. By the way, positivity is contagious as well; which would you prefer to be in the midst of?
- Friendliness is a disciplined behavior.
 - You may not always feel like being the most friendly person, but that doesn’t mean you can’t behave and act in a friendly manner. Remember, friendliness is a behavior not an emotion.



Helpfulness

- Helpfulness requires some basic knowledge.
 - In order to be an asset to your business, you must possess some specific expertise in an area that is vital to your company. But to be helpful to customers, you must possess your expertise AND have a basic breadth of knowledge regarding your business. This means that you may not always have the answers customers are looking for, but you know where to find the answers!
- Problem-solving skills are essential to helpfulness.
 - Problem solving requires:
 - Business knowledge—see above.
 - Judgment skills—the ability to form an opinion regarding needs and circumstances in order to develop an effective approach based on all available information to address customers' needs and concerns.
 - Decisiveness—the ability to make a timely decision and take action in an effort to address customers' needs and concerns.
 - Flexibility—the ability to adapt to circumstances or conditions based on the needs, conditions, or concerns of customers.
 - Situation analysis—the ability to gather relevant and useful information in order to analyze and organize necessary actions in a logical fashion.
 - Initiative—the willingness to initiate action in an effort to meet customers' needs and expectations.



Respect

- Respect is to hold in esteem the worth or excellence of a person.
 - Given the value, or worth, of customers to any business, it seems relatively clear that customers should feel a sense of respect when they interact with customer service providers.

- Some thoughts about why customers should be given respect:
 - They are the most important people in your business, either in person, over the phone, by email, or snail-mail.
 - They are not dependent on you; rather, every business is infinitely dependent on them.
 - They are not an interruption to your work and don't want to be made to feel as though they are; in fact, they are the sole purpose of your work.
 - They are not outsiders with meaningless impact on your business; to the contrary, they are the most important component of your business.
 - They aren't just names and numbers; they are people with feelings, emotions, needs, and concerns.
 - They are not people who should have to put up a fight for what they justifiably deserve; remember they have recourse—your competitors.
 - They are people who come to you with their needs and are looking for the solutions you purport to provide; it's your job to deliver.



Ownership

- You may not have all of the answers, but customers need to have the reassurance that their needs or concerns will be addressed.
 - Interestingly, you can build greater credibility with customers when you say: “I don't know the answer to that, but I certainly know where to find it or whom to talk to.”
 - Keep in mind that customers don't usually know your title or job description; to them you simply represent the opportunity to get what they need without hassle and difficulty, and preferably with effectiveness, efficiency, and from a friendly, competent person.
- Ownership isn't always about being the one to solve the problem and meet the specific need; rather, it's about facilitating and/or ensuring a satisfactory outcome.
- Customers are more at ease and feel more confident when there is an overt expression of ownership and responsibility.



Customer Service Preferred Profile Assessment

On a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 representing a consistent and effective use of the skill and 0 representing no use of the skill, rate how well you think you implement the following skills as a provider of outstanding customer service. You may want to consider having your supervisor and/or co-workers rate you as well in order to get a more balanced assessment of your customer service skills.

Skill	Description	Rating
EMPATHY	Empathy means putting yourself in the other people's shoes. How would you feel if what happened or is happening to them were to happen to you?	
ENTHUSIASM	Showing enthusiasm with customers confirms to them that they have made the right choice, are being heard, feel valued, and are welcomed. It also suggests that you like what you do and are happy doing it (even if that's not always the way you feel deep down), resulting in customer confidence related to both you and your business.	
RESPONSIBILITY	Responsibility means that whether you agree to do something big or small, you do it with reliability and dependability, and to the satisfaction of the person for whom you are doing it.	
RESILIENCY	Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from adversity. Do you hang onto a negative experiences or negative issues in your environment? It's about being able put negative distractions aside and move forward in meaningful and positive ways.	
BALANCE	Balance in the workplace can be described as a win-win: a win for the customer and a win for the business. You can't, as the saying goes, give away the farm nor can you be inflexible and still have a thriving business with customers. Balance is about finding a way to satisfy both.	

OWNERSHIP	Ownership isn't always about being the one to solve the problem and meet the specific need; rather, it's about facilitating and/or ensuring a satisfactory outcome. Customers are more at ease and feel more confident when there is an overt expression of ownership and responsibility.	
ADAPTABILITY	Adaptability is the ability to adjust to different conditions and/or variables. Each customer is unique in personality, communication style, culture, etc., and often his/her needs may be accompanied by unique circumstances that require a modified approach in order to be fully met.	
COMMUNICATION	Communication is the ability to speak clearly and professionally using a positive tone of voice while utilizing active listening skills (i.e., giving verbal cues, making eye contact, summarizing, taking notes when appropriate, etc.).	
JOB KNOWLEDGE	Job knowledge is two-fold. It's about possessing specific expertise in an area that is vital to your company and having a basic breadth of knowledge regarding your business as a whole in order to be helpful to customers.	
COMPASSION	Compassion is the ability to show concern for others, whether it is for their circumstances, feelings, point of view, or frustration over unmet needs.	
JUDGEMENT	Judgment doesn't mean you should pass judgment on customers, which unfortunately happens with all too frequent regularity; rather, it's the ability to form an opinion and make a decision regarding needs and circumstances in order to develop an effective approach based on all available information to address customers' needs and concerns.	
DECISIVE	Being decisive means being able to make decisions in a timely fashion with little hesitation in order to meet customers' needs and concerns.	

MOTIVATED BY SERVICE	Being motivated by service means that you find great joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment from working with customers, meeting their needs, and addressing their concerns.	
FLEXIBILITY	Think “creativity” when thinking about flexibility. Are you able to utilize your job knowledge and the inter-workings of your business to find flexibility when problem solving and meeting customers’ needs?	
ORGANIZED	When you’re organized, you appear orderly, thorough, and detail-oriented both from a visual standpoint and from a thought and communication standpoint.	
FOLLOW-UP	Following-up means not only delivering in a timely and responsive manner on promises and commitments, but also knowing when additional contact after the fact would be beneficial given the customer situation or circumstance.	
POSITIVE IMPRESSION	This is the ability to leave customers with both a positive imprint of you as a service provider and of your business as a great place to patronize.	
INITIATIVE	Initiative is the willingness, readiness, and ability to take action on behalf of customers without them feeling as though they have to take the lead in resolving their own needs, issues, and concerns.	
ETHICAL	When you’re ethical, you uphold principles of appropriate professional conduct in accordance with rules, standards, and policies. The most critical consideration is to be ethical while not leaving an impression with customers that you are unwilling to be helpful.	
INTEGRITY	Integrity means adhering to ethical behavior, and having high professional and social standards when dealing with customers.	

FRIENDLY	When you're friendly, you are pleasant and show interest and general kindness towards customers. Keep in mind that being friendly is a behavior, not an emotion. You may not always feel like the most friendly person, but that doesn't mean you can't behave and act in a friendly manner.	
EYE CONTACT	Eye contact is one of the key components of active listening. Customers want to know they have your attention; providing eye contact suggests you are both interested in them and engaged in what they are saying.	
SMILE	As trite as this is, smiling makes a huge difference. Having a smile on your face conveys a friendly, welcoming disposition and will acoustically lighten the tone of your voice.	
BODY LANGUAGE	Aside from eye contact and smiling, which are both expressions of body language, body language relate more generally to body frame and posture. Does your posture and facial expression convey confidence, engagement, and interest? Are your arms and hand gestures closing you off or suggesting openness and acceptance?	
ACTIVE LISTENER	Active listening has the following key elements: engaging both mentally and physically; stopping whatever you are doing that is not directly related to the communication at hand; paying attention to nonverbal cues; taking key word notes; summarizing your understanding of the issues/concerns; and being willing to see things from your customers' point of view. Listening is a gift of respect you give to others.	
ESTEEM FOR CUSTOMERS	Esteem for customers is about having a general respect for the value customers provide to the business. Do customers sense that you believe them to be an integral and important aspect of your work and the business as a whole?	

PERSONALIZE	When you personalize, you leave customers with the impression that they are separate and unique as an individual, in their needs; you relate to customers on a personal level, rather than just as a name or number.	
PHONE GREETING	You utilize a phone greeting that has the appropriate three elements: say something pleasant (i.e., “Good morning,” “How may I help you?”); identify where the caller has “landed” (department name or business name); and state your name.	
POSITIVE ATTITUDE	A positive attitude is the ability to carry yourself in such a way that you raise the positivity quotient of any environment for which you are a part. A positive attitude is a choice you make, and you are the only one who stands in the way of having a positive outlook. Nobody likes dealing with people who have a bad attitude—nobody!	
PROBLEM SOLVER	Being a problem solver means having ability to competently discern customer issues and concerns, then deliver effective, valuable, and acceptable solutions.	
USE “THANK YOU”	The use of “thank you” is what customers most often mention when asked what made for a positively memorable customer service experience. Do you say “thank you for calling” at the end of a phone conversation? Do you say “thank you for letting me know” when customers provide you with feedback? Do you regularly send thank-you notes or emails?	
ANGER MANAGEMENT	Are you able to effectively listen to customers who are angry, without allowing your emotions to get involved, and successfully deescalate their anger to the point where they are amenable and satisfied with the outcome?	
TOTAL SCORE		

Rating Scale

Composite Score	Proficiency Level	Description
160–129	You're a rock star!	You epitomize the essence of an outstanding customer service provider. The efforts you make leave an indelible and lasting positive impression on the people with whom you work, both internally and externally.
128–97	Wow, pretty impressive!	You definitely recognize what it means to meet customers' needs and recognize the value in understanding and removing the barriers to a satisfying customer experience. Just that little extra effort would make you rock too!
96–65	You're a bit wishy-washy, but the effort is appreciated.	You certainly get what it takes to provide great customer service, but may often only do it either half-heartedly or inconsistently. Being more attentive and consistent will pay off in dividends of personal fulfillment and happy customers.
64–33	You can do better than that!	You don't necessarily drink from the customer service Kool-Aid! Maybe you don't think it's in your job description or the concepts from the profile just seem extremely foreign to you; regardless, you could definitely do better because it certainly matters to your customers.
32–0	You truly need some remedial intervention.	What more is there to say?