

The Best Waitress



Concept and approach for customer service leading to
service excellence – for all industries!

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Think about the time when you were dining in an upscale restaurant where the food was great but the service was sub-standard. Maybe you tipped the waitress (or waiter) and maybe you did not. But when you ate at a restaurant where the food was just okay and the service was outstanding, you made sure that you tipped the waitress or waiter above the customary 15%, right? Even if you had to send the food back, how did that waiter or waitress handle it? Did they apologize and send it back? When the food was brought back to you, did they wait for you to check to see if it was to your satisfaction? Any good person of wait staff will check on you often, will make sure that your food (product) is to your liking and that you are completely satisfied. Checking on you often to inquire of your perception of the restaurant's services, is in essence surveying you to ensure your satisfaction. It is service, communication, feedback and action. Did you tell your friends about the service? That would be the best advertising anyone can as for – word of mouth!

It is the same concept that should be used by every business in dealing with every customer. However, it doesn't happen often enough. Some people are just having a bad day. Some actually hate their job and shouldn't be there. And others don't know how to treat customers or how to deliver exceptional customer service. It is my opinion that any product of virtually any type can be bought anywhere. What will make the difference is the customer service that surrounds the movement and handling of that product.



Personal computers, televisions, and stereos are now being sold by volume dealers (think Wal-mart, K-Mart and so on). Years ago, these items were sold by specialty shops where only a few people really knew anything about them. Now in this day and time for about \$150, you can buy a decent color TV from almost anywhere. So what makes the difference? Did the sales person talk at you or to you? Did they answer your questions or brush you off? Where do you go if your new TV develops a problem? Will the store honor your warranty? Do they have an in-house service center? If not, do you get a loaner when they ship your item out for service? As you see, it's all about the service, not about the product.



www.dictionary.com defines monopoly as: exclusive control of a commodity or service in a particular market, or a control that makes possible the manipulation of prices. Before 1984, AT&T

was a very large company. Starting in 1978, the government had an antitrust suit against AT&T. Let me share with you my theory about why the government had to get involved with the private sector. Please note that it is not based on any verifiable data, just my theory. First, by the definition above, they WERE a monopoly. But I believe that every business secretly wants to be a monopoly in the definition that: they want to be the ONLY place to go to get the product that they sell. That's what I would want as a businessman. The problem is not being a monopoly; the problem is acting like you don't care about your customers. When you provide the only service in town and you don't respond to your customers, who can the customer turn to in order to get satisfaction? To the only organization that can force that business to change – the government. It had nothing or very little to do with price, because we will pay for good service. We'll even tell people that something was really expensive but well worth it if the service provided attended to our needs. AT&T did not respond to their customers.

Microsoft was headed in that direction but quickly woke up. As of this writing, they are still one company. I would say that they are not quite a monopoly because there are other choices. However, they are the easiest choice to make with the least learning curve.



My best waitress approach is not about service. It is all about customer enthusiasm. Let's assume that your product is excellent. If it is not, you need to go back and re-visit your plans. But since you are here, we know that your product is not the problem. For customer enthusiasm, you need to communicate with your customers, get feedback and take action. You must survey your customers to fully understand how they perceive your business. You may find out that what you thought you were telling them, they were not receiving.

Here are some examples of excellent customer service.

This one is from Business Week.



Bob Emig was flying home from St. Louis on Southwest Airlines this past December when an all-too-familiar travel nightmare began to unfold. After his airplane backed away from the gate, he and his fellow passengers were told the plane would need to be de-iced. When the aircraft was ready to fly two and a half hours later, the pilot had reached the hour limit set by the Federal Aviation Administration, and a new pilot was required. By that time, the plane had to be de-iced again. Five hours after the scheduled departure time, Emig's flight was finally ready for takeoff.

A customer service disaster, right? Not to hear Emig tell it. The pilot walked the aisles, answering questions and offering constant updates. Flight attendants, who Emig says "really seemed like they cared," kept up with the news on connecting flights. And within a couple of days of arriving home, Emig, who travels frequently, received a letter from Southwest that included two free round-trip ticket vouchers. "I could not believe they acknowledged the situation and apologized," says Emig. "Then they gave me a gift, for all intents and purposes, to make up for the time spent sitting on the runway."

According to the article where that story was borrowed, Southwest Airlines did not have to offer any customer free tickets. They do it because they believe that it's the right thing to do. Just so that you'll know, I have personally flown on Southwest Airlines and they really get customer service right.



This next one is personal. My wife was searching for a patio umbrella. She found a hardware store across town that sold the exact umbrella that she required. We went to the store but they were out of umbrellas. The manager took my wife's name and phone number and promised her that when the umbrella came in, they would call her. Two weeks later, my wife received a phone call from the store that the umbrella was in. We drove the 40 minutes to the store, told the

cashier who waited on us that we received a phone call that our umbrella was in and then waited. We waited for 20 minutes before the cashier came back and told us that the umbrella was not in and that they've not had that umbrella for some time. My wife told the cashier the name of the person who called us and of course that person wasn't in. We asked to speak to a manager and had to wait another 20 or 30 minutes. That manager told us that the umbrella wasn't in and again we were told that they haven't received any in at all. We took their names and left.

I wrote to the district office explaining our customer service experience. About one week after mailing my complaint, the vice president call me, apologizing for what happened and ask how he could make it up to us. I told him that we just wanted the umbrella and I even asked if we could get the bigger one. He told us that he would have both umbrellas at the store and they wouldn't cost us anything.

We told him that would we shop at one of his stores again, but not at the location where we experienced the bad customer service.

What should have happened is that the manager should have apologized to us and made amends. The cashier is the first line to the customer and the manager should be there to support the cashier. However in most cases, the cashier does not have the authority to make decisions like that. But we received no apology from anyone at the store. That was their second mistake. Can you think of the first mistake?



Before we get into the suggestions, let's look at what I call are gimmies. This is our assumptions of what parts of your business that you know you're taking care of. As this is not a business class but a class to enhance your business, specifically customer service. You must be sure that the following are at a high level.

Gimmies:

- Employee Satisfaction plan
- Clean environment
- Product placement
- Competitive prices
- Marketing, Marketing, Marketing
- Dress code
- Professionalism
- Have a Customer Service Policy
- Have a Customer Management Policy
- Check, Inspect and Measure
- Watch your money

Suggestions:

1. Know your customers. You have repeat customers. What are their names? When they bring their family in, do you know any names? When they are buying something for their business, do you know anything about their business and how you can help them? When you have a sale of an item that may be of interest to them, letting them know via a mailing list would really help them out.

Notes:

2. Keep a database of your customers. If you don't have a access to a computer, keep a list of your customers via a simple spreadsheet and pen and paper. I like it when music stores send me a happy birthday card. A long time ago it was the only birthday card that I would receive. But I always shopped at that particular store. And they knew my name. They knew that I was a bass player who liked recording equipment and would tell me about the new items that came in.

Notes:

3. Practice the best waitress approach. Check with your customers often to make sure they are okay. Don't sell but help them to understand what you have based on their needs. This means you need to understand their needs

Notes:

4. Understand what your customers think of you. Ask them questions such as, “how do you like our....? Sometimes maybe only once per year, do a formal survey. Make the survey simple so that they will complete it. If it is too complicated and takes too much time, your survey that you are so proud of will get trashed. Perhaps a quick phone survey will do. And example would be: Today you shopped in our store. Was everything easy to find? Did the salesperson answer all your questions to your satisfaction? Would you shop there again? Do you have any comments that you would like to add? When you get the response, be sure to act on any negative information and follow up with your customers. The follow up does not have to be directly to the customer with the negative comments unless they specifically request it but a general communication such as, “You told us that our products were not easy to find so we moved everything to eye level.

Notes:

5. Ask what your customers value from your company. You can informally ask during the purchase and you can definitely pay attention to what they buy. If it’s not too many questions, ask them during the survey.

Notes:

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6. Give them something. Give them some extra service – even if it isn't extra, tell them it is. Do you have anything with your company logo on it that you can give them? These can be bought inexpensively for giveaways. Search the web, there are lots of items that you can get from ball caps, to pens, pencils, shirts and almost anything that you can think of.

Notes:

7. Tell your customers that you appreciate their business. Tell them in person and by mail. Again, give them something. In Bellville Michigan, DiMitris restaurant would have a customer appreciation day. It was the only time that breakfast was free all day. In addition, one day three of us went to pickup our dinner of about 15 pieces of chicken. I told the manager that since we were his favorite customer, how about giving us dessert? That manager gave us a whole coconut cream pie. You know that we kept going back!

Notes:

8. Communicate with your customers often. Tell them what's going on, what's new and what's special. Let your customers know who got promoted and how that helps them. You'll have to balance the frequency of communication. Perhaps once a quarter is just enough. Depending on your business, you can send a card or letter or an email.

Notes:

9. Always say what you'll do and follow up by doing what you said you'd do. Deliver your business with integrity at all times. Customers don't like it when you said that you would do something and then don't. Cable companies lose to satellite companies often when they don't follow through with showing up when promised and vice versa. How many times did you leave a company because they didn't follow through on their promise?

Notes:

10. Be polite. Don't call a customer by their first name unless the customer requests it. Use sir and ma'am because it goes a long way, no matter the age. Learn how to leave out words such as "huh", "not my job", "I dunno" and "you'll have to ask so and so"... If you don't know, find out. Ask the question for the customer so that they will see that you care.

Notes:

11. When the customer calls with an issue, be sure that every other call is from you to them. The customer should only make one

phone call. It is up to the company to update the customer often. Be sure to apologize to the customer but concentrate on the fix.

Notes:

12. Concentrate on the fix, not the excuse. As a customer, I am more interested in what you are going to do about my issue and I really don't want to hear your excuses. The only reason I want to know what happened is to know that it won't happen again. And never ever blame the customer!

Notes:

13. When you get the issue resolved, never let it happen again. Be sure to train your staff about the problem and the resolution so that it doesn't happen again. In a technical field, we used to do a post mortem on an issue to understand what happened, why it happened and how to ensure that it would not happen again. Everyone involved would be present so that we would fully understand what happened.

Notes:

14. When working an issue, never blame the other guy, the other company, a coworker or your employer. Think about it, how the

customer feels about you bad-mouthing the place where they want or wanted to conduct business. You are basically telling them that they are stupid, made a poor choice and that doesn't go over well.

Notes:

15. Never talk bad about any customer outside of closed doors. If you must talk about a customer, do it in an office in the middle of the building where there is no customer access. Customers listen and talk to each other because customers have friends like you do.

Notes:

16. For some of your stores customers like to "just look around" But some customers will come in and wait for you to ask them if they need your help. However, when the customer just wants to look around, let them look around. You have to gage when you are being helpful and when you're being annoying.

Notes:

17. Whatever your produce is, deliver it as fast as you can without being sloppy. Remember, no matter what, customers like to be

served in a speedy manner. But, do not rush to the point that you are dropping the customer's product, misspelling their name or missing something important. Training, training and more training.

Notes:

18. Did we mention training? Be sure that staff members are trained. Trained to handle customers, product and customer issues. Be sure that when issues are fixed, the staff is trained on what happened so that it doesn't happen again. You want to train your customers on who does what in your organization so that when customer issues arise, they will know where to go to talk to whom.

Notes:

19. When fixing an issue, be sure to offer something as an apology. For restaurant a free dessert or drink. For others, some product that you can afford to give away. We all know that sometimes stuff happens. It's all in the "what are you going to do about it" that makes the difference.

Notes:

20. Always, always, always say thank you. When a customer comes in and browses but doesn't buy anything, say thank you, maybe they are just checking you out. When they purchase something you MUST definitely thank them for shopping with you. There are always other choices.

Notes:

You may not need to follow each and every one of these suggestions but you will have to implement some. What you want to do is to look at your customer facing organization and understand its strengths and weaknesses. Mark off what is done well and mark off where improvements are needed. Talk to your organization about what is needed and why. Make the changes and document everything. Be sure to observe what happens and when the changes are taking effect. Go over with your team everything that you observe. Monitor and track your success. Don't forget to reward your team when they do it right to encourage that positive behavior.



Getting Started:

Start small, fix those issues and then move on. What three suggestions would you implement tomorrow?

- 1. -----
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- 2. -----
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- 3. -----
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Who will facilitate the training?

- 1. -----
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- 2. -----
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- 3. -----
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What are the next three suggestions?

- 1. -----
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- 2. -----
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- 3. -----
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Facilitator:

- 1. -----
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- 2. -----
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- 3. -----
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Additional notes:

3. Publish results
4. Publish the fixes
5. Understand what your customers value from your company – Ask them
 - a. Ask them during the purchase and be prepared to listen
 - b. Pay attention to what they buy
 - c. Ask them in a survey
6. Give them something
 - a. Value of service
 - b. Something to remind them of your company
7. Let them know that you appreciate them – Tell them
 - a. In person
 - b. Via mail – mass mailing
 - c. Via email or mail - personal
8. Communicate with your customers often – Tell them
 - a. Email
 - b. Cards
 - c. Letters
9. Say what you will do and do what you say
 - a. Integrity
 - b. Follow-up
10. Be polite
 - a. Sir / Ma'am
 - b. Mr. / Ms Last name
11. When issues arise, the customers make only one phone call.
 - a. Update the customer often
 - b. Don't be afraid to fall on your sword

12. Never blame “the other guy”
 - a. Never down talk another company
 - b. Never ever down talk any co-worker or your employer!
13. Concentrate on the fix, not the excuse
 - a. Customers are more interested in “what you’re doing about it”
 - b. Only interested in how it happened to understand how it won’t happen again.
14. Don’t let the problem / issue happen again
15. Never talk bad about any customer
 - a. Customers listen
 - b. Customers talk
 - c. Customers have friends
16. Know the difference between needing help and “just looking”
17. Deliver your product with speed
18. Train your staff, train your staff, train your staff
 - a. Fix issues with customers
 - b. Fix issues with staff
19. When fixing an issue, add something as an apology
20. Always say thank you!
 - a. Even if they don’t buy anything
 - b. Definitely if they buy something

Customer Issue Management

Company Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** ____ **Zip:** _____

Phone No: _____ **Fax:** _____

Contact: _____ **Email:** _____

Phone number: _____

Contact: _____ **Email:** _____

Phone Number _____

Issue / Complaint: _____

Resolution: _____

City:

State:

Submitted Date:

ZIP:

Apology Example:

[Your Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]
March 3, 2007

[Recipient Name]
[Title]
[Company Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

Thank you for your letter of June 3 describing the problems that you have been having with INC Incorporated. I appreciate your candor and must agree that we are not managing our co-op program very well. Please accept my sincere apologies.

We are not taking your dissatisfaction lightly. In fact, your letter has been forwarded to several key people in our organization, including our president. We are already working to improve our internal process, and I hope you will bear with us as we develop a better approach to handling specific issues that arise with this program.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Title]

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Copy of customer letters that I have received.

From: Micki O'Connor
Sent: Thursday, July 13, 2006 12:00 PM
To: Zohn, Edward
Subject: Great Service

I wanted to let you know about the great service I received recently from your Customer Service Representative, Dave. I was given Dave's name and number through my realtor when I recently purchased a new home in Concord. I had been trying to get TW service installed for 2 weeks prior to Dave getting involved and I was going no where. Dave took the bull by the horns, told me the buck stopped with him and he meant it. He was able to get a technician scheduled on the day I requested. That was wonderful, except that the service to my home had not been made "hot" to the whole neighborhood yet. Nevertheless, the tech connected my drop and made sure all connections were toned and tested.

I called Dave the next day and explained to him what the tech had told me. He was extremely empathetic and told me he would get right on it. During the course of the next 2 weeks, Dave gave me regular status reports, assured me he was doing everything he could to get the construction/engineering groups moving along etc. I do believe he was doing everything possible.

Tuesday, when I got home from work, Dave called me to tell me I had service. I was amazed and checked right away and sure enough, I did have my TV working again. I was thrilled.

I want you to know that I believe Dave is one of the best customer service reps I have ever worked with. He was patient, calm, courteous and professional during all the time I worked with him. If not for him, I guarantee you, I would have called DirecTV and I would have taken their service. Dave is an asset to your company and I wish I could work with a Dave in every company I do business with.

Sincerely,
Micki

Ms. Micki O'Connor
Director - Network Operations/Support
CT Communications

From: Butler, Melva
Sent: Wednesday, March 14, 2007 5:16 PM
To: removed

Subject: Dave

To whom it may concern,

I, Melva Butler, just wanted to take a moment to inform management of the excellent customer service I received today. On Saturday, March 10th my cable, telephone and internet was suppose to be turned on but due to some technical difficulties, it wasn't. I had been playing phone tag w/ Time Warner customer service to reset my date. Fortunately someone called to help me and it was Dave. Dave was very polite, courtesy, and patient w/ me, who on the other hand was very frustrated and not so pleasant. Dave did everything possible to get me the earliest day. Now my parents, who resides in Michigan, don't have to wait another week to hear their granddaughter voice.

I currently work at Bank of America and our goal is for our customers to be highly satisfied. Well, today I got to feel what our customers feel after receiving excellent customer service. Thank you so much, I look forward to more years w/ Time Warner Cable.

Melva Butler
Home Services Specialist II
phone number removed

My goal is for you to be highly satisfied. If at any time you are not, please feel free to contact me or my manager, *removed* at 704-555-1212 or via e-mail at removed@BankofAmerica.com

Confidential and Proprietary Bank of America

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Holland Consultants will help your business achieve high customer satisfaction goals. We will instruct your employees in how to recognize opportunities to provide the type of service that will satisfy your customers. These suggestions will help identify and improve areas where needed. However, consistency is the key. Once started on the path of customer

service improvement, your customers will notice and expect nothing less.



We can also assist you in creating a web presence. You want to use the web to deliver information and to reach your customers. Let us get your web site started. With only a small investment, your web site will have email (yourname@yourname.com), your domain name, your contact information and your product information. With a web site, you will reach the world.

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