Customer Service Excellence: It’s in the Details!

By Lisa Ford

Three types of service

- Rude
- Indifferent
- Exceptional

Exceptional service makes a customer feel served, not processed.

Exceptional service is paying attention to the details and doing the basics well.

Five Characteristics of Quality Customer Service

1. Reliability
   - Follow the Grandmother Rule – *Do what you say you will do, when you say you will do it, and do it right the first time.*
   - If you fail to do it right the first time follow the: Guidelines for Recovering Customer Loyalty – *apologize sincerely, fix the problem, do something extra (tells the customer you will do better next time and this is not the way you normally do business) and follow-up.*

2. Responsiveness
   - Pay attention to the customer’s perceptions – When a passenger takes their seat on an airplane and discovers coffee stains on the pull down table, they also wonder about the maintenance of the engine of the plane. If patients in a doctor’s office notice they have sick and dying plants in the waiting room they might also wonder about the quality of care they will receive. If your customers think you suck, you suck! It’s all about their perception. Ask yourself - *What are your coffee stains?*
   - Timeliness – solve the problem quickly. Customers require faster service more now than ever before. Try to give them service as quickly as you would want to receive the service yourself.
   - Take Ownership – if you wait on the customer do not transfer them to someone else, rather follow through and get them the service they are
requesting even if you have to speak to others in order to complete the customer service. This is known as the *One Voice, or First Touch, Last Touch Concept*.

3. **Making the Customer Feel Valued**  
   - Watch Your Tone of Voice – make sure your tone is warm, upbeat and friendly. Record yourself to hear how your customers might hear you.  
   - Use the Customer’s Name - 2 to 3 times during the transaction, go formal unless the customer request otherwise. If you do not know how to pronounce the customer’s name, ask them, then make a note for the next time they come in.  
   - Watch Your Body Language – energy level can be affected even when speaking on the phone.
   - Use Positive Words – Rather than saying “I am sorry that you had to wait” say “thank you for waiting.” Rather than saying “it is our policy” say “this is how we usually handle this”. Use the word “can” rather than the word “can’t” at all times.

4. **Empathy**  
   - Understand the Customer’s Problem - build a partnership with the customer by using empathy statements and making the problem the enemy.
   - Practice Active Listening - attentive silence, attentive words, using door opening questions and restating the problem (in your own words not the customer’s words) to clarify and confirm the problem.

5. **Competence**  
   - Continue to Learn and Grow – be informed, ask questions of your co-workers and manager. Try to learn all the details about your job.
   - Build Rapport with Your Customers – by matching your customer’s style. If they appear to be slow and concerned then you handle their service slowly and with concern, if they are exceptionally friendly than you are exceptionally friendly.