Inside This Course:

Why Nurses and Case Managers Need to Know Customer Service

6.8 Contact Hours

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Objectives

After reading the program titled Why Nurses and Case Managers Need to Know Customer Service, you will be able to:

1. Define customer service
2. Determine what contributes to customer satisfaction.
3. Explain why customer service will be even more important in the new millennium than it is today.
4. Focus on all of your customers, but recognize those who are truly assets to your organization over time.
5. Recognize and do something about those issues that will surely drive your customers away.
6. Describe the hallmarks of "unforgettable" customer service.
7. Determine if you, personally, are a "right fit" for a position where you have constant contact with customers.
8. Place customer service at the top of your priority list.
9. Practice "cutting edge" customer service every day in every way.
10. Determine which of the customer problem-solving strategies presented will work in your organization.
11. Incorporate dynamic attitudes and behaviors into your routine work that will insure that you are going "extra mile" every day with your customers.
FOREWORD

I’m a nice customer. You all know me. I’m the one who never complains, no matter what kind of service I get.

I’ll go into a restaurant and sit quietly while the waiters and waitresses gossip and never bother to ask if anyone has taken my order. Sometimes a party that came in after I did gets my order, but I don’t complain. I just wait.

And when I go to a store to buy something, I don’t throw my weight around. I try to be thoughtful of the other person. If a snooty salesperson gets upset because I want to look at several things before making up my mind, I’m just as polite as can be. I don’t believe rudeness in return is the answer.

The other day I stopped at a full service gas station and waited for almost five minutes before the attendant took care of me. And when he did, he spilled gas and wiped the windshield with an oily rag. But did I complain about the service? Of course not.

I never kick. I never nag. I never criticize. And I wouldn’t dream of making a scene, as I’ve seen some people do in public places. I think that’s uncalled for. No, I’m the nice customer. And I’ll tell you who else I am.

I’m the customer who never comes back!

When I get pushed too far, I just take my business down the street to places where they’re smart enough to hire and train people who appreciate nice customers. And the world is filled with nice customers, just like me, who can put anyone out of business.

I laugh when I see you frantically spending your money on expensive advertising to get me back, when you could have kept me with a few kind words, a smile, and some good service.

I don’t care what business you’re in. Maybe you live in a different town; maybe I’ve never heard of you. But if you’re going broke or your business is bad, maybe there are enough people like me who do not know you. I’m your customer who never comes back.

Author Unknown (but nice)
CONTENT OUTLINE:

I. What Exactly Is Customer Service / Customer Satisfaction?
   a. Don't Be Surprised If You Get Many Different Answers
   b. Good versus Bad Service

II. What's All the "Hoopla" About Customer Service Anyway?
   a. Evolving Trends in Employment
   b. Paradigm Shifting
   c. Retaining a Customer Base
   d. The Payoffs for You in Paying Attention to Them

III. Who Are Your Customers and Do You Really Know Them and What They Want From You?
    a. External Customers
    b. Internal Customers
    c. Use of Focus Groups
    d. The Survey / Follow-Up Approach
    e. The Informal "You" Approach

IV. What Drives a Customer Away, Perhaps Forever?
    a. The "Straws That Break the Customer's Back!"

V. What Keeps a Customer for Life?
   a. Something Called Value - Added Service
   b. Respect for and Commitment to the Customer Bill of Rights

VI. So, How Do You Know That You Are In the Right Place, At the Right Time With The Right Stuff?
   a. Tolerance for Customer Contact
   b. Your Attitude With Your Customers
      i. Approach – Avoidance
   c. Your Focus While at Work
      i. Production versus Service
   d. Determining Your Emotional Intelligence
   e. Credentials versus "People Powers"

VII. How To Get Better 'n Better With Your Customers
    a. Customer – Focused Care Delivery
    b. Re-Prioritize Your Priorities and Re-tool Your Customer Service Toolbox.

VIII. Re-engineering Yourself
    a. Your Personalized Customer- Service Makeover!
       i. Body Language Revisited
       ii. Your Voice? Yes, Your Voice!
       iii. Hello? Is Anyone on the Other End of this Phone?
       iv. And Your Attitude Towards Your Customer? Let's Take a Good Look at It.
       v. Lessons from the Energizer Bunny on "Going the Extra Mile!"
       vi. Successfully Surfing the Waves of Challenging (Dare I Say Difficult) Customers and Situations.
WHAT EXACTLY IS CUSTOMER SERVICE / CUSTOMER SATISFACTION?

As we begin this program, I want you to know that I would like your involvement because you, too, are often a customer. Knowing that, you may find that some of your learning will be based upon your own personal knowledge and experience as a customer. With that in mind, I would like to invite you to take a few minutes to answer the question: What is customer service? See if you can write down at least three (3) different answers. Think about your experiences in different places where you go for service such as a restaurant, the doctor’s office, car repair shop, etc. Give yourself about ten (10) minutes to write down your answers. Well, how did it go? Maybe this was the first time you have ever really thought about customer service. That's okay... I hope this exercise got you thinking. Now let's take a look at some definitions that are out there in the literature:

- Customer Service is a philosophy in which all employees feel and act accountable for creating satisfied customers.
- Customer Service means projecting a positive image. (Anonymous)
- From the customer's point of view, if they can see it, walk on it hold it, hear it, step in it, smell it, carry it, step over it, touch it, use it, even taste it, if they can feel it or sense it, it's customer service. (Super American Training Program)
- Consistently creating enjoyable experiences so that people want to tell all their personal contacts about how great your organization is.
- Shouldn’t it really be called “Customer Helping” rather than “customer Service”? AND wouldn’t you deliver better service if you thought of it that way?

Did any of these definitions match yours? No? Well, how about a few more to ponder? Here we go!

- Customer service is those principles and processes that combine to give your customer a warm feeling of satisfaction, maybe even joy from interacting with your organization.
- Customer service is not rocket science. It is giving the type of treatment you hope a family member would receive when dealing with a seller.
- Customer service is a 24-hour deal!

Are we on the same wavelength yet? I hope so. But, if not, I have a few concluding thoughts for you.

**One comes from Michael Baber of Integrated Business Leadership Through Cross Marketing. I want to give Mr. Baber credit because he has created Baber's Rules of Customer Service, which go like this:**

- Make the customer feel heard.
- Make the customer understood.
- Make the customer liked.
- Make the customer respected.
- Make the customer feel helped.
- Make the customer appreciated.
I also like Jeff Gittomer’s quote in his book titled Customer Satisfaction is Worthless, Customer Loyalty Is Priceless, p.90

• “If you will just be real, be friendly, and be WOW (give great service)! You are half way up the ladder to customer loyalty and personal success beyond your wildest dreams.”

You may now have a fairly good idea of what customer service is all about so what about customer satisfaction? Before we tackle that topic, I have another short exercise for you to do to set the mood. Come on now...it'll be fun! I'd like you to think of recent situations where you were a customer and received outstanding service and then situations where you received less than desirable (dare I say shoddy?) service. This exercise is always more fun if you can talk to others about similar situations they experienced so go ahead and network with others. Try to identify specific characteristics of each kind of service type...outstanding and shoddy. Making up contrasting lists would be ideal. Now that you have your lists in front of you, I would like to offer some thoughts regarding service from the customer's perspective:

• Good service only becomes great service when the customer says it is great!
• Consistent high quality service boils down to two (2) things: caring and competence (Chip R. Bell and Ron Zemke, Service Wisdom)
• Good service is not smiling at the customer, but getting the customer to smile at you.
• Organizations that focus on superior service turn out to be all around better and successful than those that treat customers like the enemy and customer service as either a grudging afterthought or a necessary evil.

Do you agree? Do any of the foregoing thoughts fit in with the information you have indicated on your descriptions of excellent vs. shoddy customer service that you have experienced? I hope so because customer satisfaction truly resides in the mind of the customer. To be honest, if the customer ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy!

Here is an example of one satisfied customer who admits it was a very small thing that makes him tell this story over and over:

• “I flew to Hawaii last spring. First time. Seven hours in the plane makes a person like me a very weary traveler. I was met at the airport by my host and given the traditional lei (necklace of flowers). Fantasy fulfilled. Gritty from the plane ride, I entered the lobby of the Hawaii Prince Hotel…walk over to the desk…someone smiles at me …says “Aloha!”, and gives me a hot, steamed, moist washcloth…ah! Just what I needed. WOW, what a great way to greet a customer.”

After reading this anecdote, I have to ask you three questions:

1. How do you greet your customers?
2. What separates you from your competition?
3. Where’s the washcloth in your job?
**WHAT’S ALL THE HOOPLA ABOUT CUSTOMER SERVICE ANYWAY?**

Now that you are aware of the importance of customer service and you recognize the value of satisfying the customer, then why all the heightened emphasis on customer service these days?? Well, it’s because employment trends have shifted to the point where most businesses are service oriented more than production or practice oriented. It’s true! Providing service to others has become a major focus. What a paradigm shift! Instead of merely focusing on producing goods, we are now focusing much more on how we provide them to the customer. Remember, there is competition out there! The customer can go just about anywhere to get the same or similar product or service. So why should he come to you or your organization for what he needs? When he does come, are you aware of why and do you make efforts to ensure that he comes again and again?

A typical organization hears from only 4 percent of its dissatisfied customers. The other 96 percent just quietly go away and 91 percent will never come back. That represents a serious financial loss for organizations whose employees don’t really know how to treat customers, and a tremendous gain for those who do. (LeBoeuf, p. xv)

Reilly (p.52) has developed a simple quiz that any organization can use to determine the level of service it is offering. I believe it is also a helpful quiz for any individual to use to evaluate his level of customer service focus. Take a minute to circle “yes” or “no” to each of the following questions to the best of your ability.

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<td>3. Do you routinely ask customers, “How am I (or how are we) doing?”</td>
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<td>4. Do your employees, co-workers, and managers like customers?</td>
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<td>5. Do you feel it is too expensive to give customer service?</td>
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<td>6. Do you thank every customer for his or her business?</td>
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<td>7. Have you ever thought, “We’re the only game in town. We don’t need to worry about customer service?”</td>
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<td>8. Is it important to serve customers in good times as well as bad times in your organization?</td>
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<td>9. Would you or your employer open your closed place of business to help one of your customers?</td>
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<td>10. Do you get all of the repeat business that you should?</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>11. Have you ever thought, “If they would just leave me alone, I could get my job done?”</td>
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<td>12. Is customer satisfaction a guiding principle for you? For your organization?</td>
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The purpose of this quiz is to heighten your awareness to those items, which you circled as “no.” They represent areas where you and your organization could improve existing customer service. It does mean focusing most of your attention on your customer and what he or she likes or wants. It means practicing the rules of customer service. Below are examples of such rules (Reilly, p.13).

The Nine Rules of Customer Service

1. **Every employee is a salesperson**… everyone in any organization sells something to someone.

2. **Not everybody believes #1**… Do you feel negatively about salespeople? Do words like pushy, sleazy, manipulative and liar come to mind?

3. **Not everyone behaves according to #1**… If you don’t believe you are a salesperson, you’ll feel no need to behave like a salesperson. You’ll do your job and the heck with the customer or you’ll do just enough to keep the customer off your back?

4. **Every employee has a customer**…even if you never have contact with those whom you traditionally think of as customers, you still have customers…they are the people with whom you work on a day-to-day basis…those you serve in some work-related way. And…they deserve good customer service also.

5. **Adding value to customer service is not a spectator sport**…everyone in your organization should be actively and enthusiastically involved in giving positive customer service. No one
can afford to sit back and adopt the attitude of “that’s not part of my job” or “I’ll let someone else do it…I have better things to do with my time.”

6. Security and future in an organization are directly related to how much value an employee adds, not costs…ask yourself if you helping or hurting your organization with your daily actions.

7. “We” is greater than “me”…everyone in your organization should be moving toward a common goal of directly serving external customers (those you sell to) or indirectly serving internal (those you work with each day) customers.

8. Value is personal, perceptual, and performance-driven… it is personal meaning that your customer defines what the value of your service is, not you; it is perceptual meaning that your customers define the value of your service based on what they perceive and much of what they perceive is based on your attitude and performance while you are serving them; it is performance-driven meaning that they define the value of your service on the impact that it has on their life, their job or their organization.

9. Everyone must belong to something… this is true of your customers and your co-workers. So…do you make them feel like they are a part of your organization or your work group? Believe me…if you don’t make them feel like they belong, some other organization out there would love to take them in and make them feel welcome and important. It makes sense then to figuratively “hug” all of your customers (external and internal) doesn’t it? In other words, make all of your customers feel like they are “family.”

Practicing the rules of customer service can help to retain those customers who already come to you for services. Paying attention to your customers can have big payoffs in guaranteed business from them for life and positive word of mouth advertising for your organization that costs nothing but can generate even more devoted customers over time. It seems like a worthwhile investment to focus on your customers.

In your day-to-day work, what standards are you setting? What makes your customers talk about you?

A survey on “Why Customers Quit”(LeBoeuf, p. xv) found the following:

- 3 percent move away
- 5 percent develop other organizational relationships
- 9 percent leave for competitive reasons
- 14 percent are dissatisfied with the quality of the service they received
- 68 percent quit because of an attitude of indifference toward the customer by those working within the organization.
WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS AND DO YOU REALLY KNOW WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU?

Do you really know who your particular customers are and what they want from you? It’s true that your customer base is all the customers that you serve in whatever capacity. But…it makes sense to look at your customers by grouping them according to various characteristics. The simplest way is to divide them into two basic groups…those who are your internal customers and those who are your external customers.

Your internal customers are those who work within your organization. Regardless of whether they are at another location in your building, in another state or country or sitting at the next desk or working on the floor above or below you…if they depend on you and the work you do in order to complete their own work or serve their own customers…then they are your internal customers. Internal customers are those who benefit from your work or conversely suffer when your work is not done or done poorly. Sometimes it is difficult to identify your internal customers especially when you do not see them face-to-face. It is even harder to know who they are if you are not sure if they see or deal with the work you produce. Then again it may be easy especially if the internal customers you serve also provide some sort of service to you.

Regardless, your internal customers deserve the same great service you would normally give to an external customer.

Is external customer a new term for you? Let me define it for you. External customers are the people who purchase your services. They are external to or outside of your organization. They are the source of the revenue that funds your organization’s continuing operations. Without external customers, your organization won’t be in business for very long. External customers literally pay your salary. They are pretty easy to identify.

Interesting facts about serving internal and external customers:

- Anything and everything you do to serve your internal customers ripples outward, affecting how well you serve your external customers.
- You can serve your external customers only to the degree that you serve your internal customers.
- Customer satisfaction mirrors employee satisfaction.
- Happy employees create happy customers (internal and external).

It is a critical part of your job to identify your customers, to know what it is that they need or want from you and how you can provide it for them. Watch all of your customers closely. Their actions will tell you more than their words. Monitor customer behaviors that tell you how they really feel about your company and its services. Become aware of such behaviors as: repeat visits, the frequency of using a service or services and the amount of referrals sent to you by your customers. Collect information from your customers at every opportunity. Listen closely to what they tell you when they call or ask questions or present you with problems.

Talk to your customers one on one at the time when they are using your services. Ask them to be blunt in their evaluation and criticisms. Ask them pointed questions about why they did or did not come for specific services. Make it easy for them to tell you. Ask them what they really like about their favorite organizations where they seek similar services, even if it’s totally unrelated to your organization. Get a sense of what kind of treatment your customers value from wherever the source. Then try to figure
out how to include those qualities in your customer service approaches. Get to know your customers as unique people. The more you know about their lives, the more you will understand how your services fit in with the whole of their lives…it may give you some clues on how to better present or package your services to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty to your organization. Daniel Scoggins, president and CEO of TGI Friday’s, a popular restaurant says: “The only way to know how customers see your business is to look at it through their eyes.”

Serve your internal and external customers well by understanding them deeply. Use surveys and other tools to determine customer satisfaction. They show that the organization cares about customers. They should be as simplistic as is possible. You could use a three (3) question form given during the time a customer is leaving. The three questions should be based on three things that are usually most important to a customer: value of the service, were promises kept such as the appointment time, etc., and would the customer return. Here is an example of one customer satisfaction survey tool.

**Customer Satisfaction Survey**

*Please check the box to the left of the term that best describes your feelings about services from [Your Organization].*

1. All things considered, the experience of doing business with [Your Organization] is:
   - Delightful
   - Positive
   - Somewhat Positive
   - Unpleasant
   - Terrible
   - Less Than Positive

2. Overall, was the service you recently purchased from [Your Organization]:
   - Better than you expected
   - About what you expected
   - Not quite what you expected
   - Not at all what you expected

3. Please comment: ____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. How satisfied were you with the overall value of the service you received from [Your Organization]:
   - It Was Great!
   - Good, Solid Value
   - Something of a Let Down
   - Very Disappointing

5. Overall, how satisfied are you with the service you received from [Your Organization]:
   - I love it!
   - I’m pleased
   - I’m disappointed
   - I thought it was awful

6. Compared to all other places from which you receive services, [Your Organization] is
   - Much better to do business with
   - Somewhat better to do business with
Gittomer, p. 98 talks about using a WOW Report Card to determine how satisfied your customers are with your service. He says that you should look for the following reactions from your customers that will tell you that they believe you are WOW (give great service):

- Getting WOW comments on the spot
- Getting (earning) a smile from the person you are helping.
• Hearing “I can’t thank you enough,” or “I don’t know how to thank you.”
• Getting personal invitations from your customers for sporting events, parties, etc.
• Hearing “One of your customers was telling me about you and had very nice things to say about you. “WOW!”
• A letter from a customer you WOWed!
• Repeat business from the customer you WOWed.
• A referred customer from someone you WOWed.

Getting all W’s is being and doing WOW consistently. The absence of WOW is a report card also.

Using a focus group approach is often a good way of determining how customers like doing business with an organization. It’s a great way of involving customers. Typically a focus group consists of groups of 10-12 customers. A time of 1 and ½ hours is spent in asking the group general questions about the strengths and weakness of the organization. Then the leader focuses in on one special area of interest by asking ten (10) questions about the services provided (these questions could be taken directly from a written survey tool). The questions could be about their experiences with staff. Questions such as:

• Did you feel comfortable talking with us?
• Did we know our business or our service?
• Did our staff call you within 2 weeks to be sure our service was okay?

Reilly asks what he terms power questions to determine customer satisfaction. They are as follows:

• How strongly would you consider coming to this place for service again?
• Would you enthusiastically recommend to a close friend or associate that they come here for services?
• To how many people in the past year have you recommended this organization?
• If you could make your recent service choice over again, would you still come to this place for service?

In conclusion, it is a good idea to give the focus group some sort of gift as they leave as a nice way of thanking them for donating their time and demonstrating their interest. A gift certificate to a local restaurant is always a nice gesture.

The bottom line in assessing customer satisfaction is to serve your customers well by understanding them deeply. Do use surveys and other tools to determine how pleased they are, but don’t rely on them completely. They are simply no substitute for what is called “breathing customer air” meaning being out there where your customers are so you can continually ask them how you and your organization are doing to meet their needs. As we complete this part of our program, I would like to leave you with some parting thoughts about customers:

“If you're not serving the customer, your job is to be serving someone who is.”

Jan Carizon
Former CEO, SAS
Rule 1: The customer is always right!

Rule 2: If the customer is ever wrong, reread Rule 1.

Stew Leonard’s Dairy Store
Norwalk, Connecticut

Customer expectations of service organizations are loud and clear: look good, be responsive, be reassuring by being courteous and competent, be empathetic but, most of all be reliable. Do what you said you would do!

Dr. Leonard Berry
Researcher, Texas A&M University

Despite all of the untold millions of products and services for sale today, customers will exchange their hard-earned money for only two things:

- Good feelings
- Solutions to problems (including their health problems) So…

Don’t sell me things. Sell me ideals, feelings, self-respect, a good home life, and happiness.

(LeBoeuf, p. 23)
WHAT DRIVES A CUSTOMER AWAY, PERHAPS FOREVER?

We’ve learned a lot about what customer service and satisfaction are and a whole lot more about who our customers are and how to find out what they want from us, but now is the time to learn what our customers absolutely will not tolerate! We can even label these “no-no’s” as the “straws that break the customer’s back” or:

The Ten (10) Deadly Sins of Customer Service (Anderson and Zemke, Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service, p. 36)

1. “I don’t know.” Customers expect you to know something about the services you provide. If you really don’t know, say the magical words, “I’ll find out.” Then do just that…find out and get back to them.

2. “I don’t care.” When your attitude, words or appearance indicate that you “don’t care” about your customers, they react by wishing they had not made the decision to come to you for services. They feel that they made a “really bad choice.” Customers want you to care about serving them.

3. “I can’t be bothered.” If your actions indicate that other things take precedence over your customers like personal phone calls, a conversation with a co-worker, etc., your customer is going to get annoyed. You can imagine what your customer feels like if you ignore his or her obvious attempt to get your attention.

4. “I don’t like you.” Attitudes and behaviors (overt or covert) that indicate that a customer is a real annoyance are memorable to the customer but for all the wrong reasons. They remember not to come back!

5. “I know it all.” Being “pushy” and forcing customers into decisions is not the way to win a customer for life. It’s a good way to win an enemy for life who will eagerly tell others not to come to your organization for service.

6. “You don’t know anything.” Cutting off, putting down or demeaning your customers is a good way of “slamming the door in their face.” It simply encourages them to do business elsewhere.

7. “We don’t want your kind in here.” Prejudices can show up in attitudes you may not even know you have. For example: Do you treat the elderly differently than you do your younger customers? Do you treat customers in suits and ties differently from those in T-shirts and tennis shoes? Remember that all customers deserve courtesy and respect.

8. “Don’t come back.” Don’t let your attitude and behavior tell your customer that you really don’t care if they ever return to your organization. Thank customers often for their business and loyalty… it builds a life long relationship!

9. “I’m right and you’re wrong.” Arguing with customers over a point of personal belief or pride is not going to win them over to your organization. Try giving them the “benefit of the doubt.”

10. “Hurry up and wait.” Customers do not want to waste their time either in waiting or in having to contact your organization repeatedly for errors in service. Do all you can do to respect their time constraints by” doing things right the first time.”
Using the wrong words with the wrong intent and the wrong tone can add fire to any argument with a customer or start an argument so trust me…don’t ever use the following words (this is a partial list).

- There’s no way…
- I don’t handle that.
- Our computers are down.
- I don’t have time
- So what do you want me to do about it?
- I’m very busy right now.
- I can’t find any record of it.
- We have done the best we could do.
- I don’t have to take this from you.
- You don’t have to be rude about it.
- I’m just doing my job.
- Please don’t use that language or I’ll leave.
- I’m sorry…I can get into trouble if I…
- (Fake a smile and say in a sassy voice)…”Have a nice day!”

A customer is not someone to argue or match wits with. No body ever won an argument with a customer.
Why Nurses and Case Managers Need to Know Customer Service

What Keeps a Customer for Life?

Now that we know what not to do with your customers, let’s focus in on what will have the greatest impact. What can you do that will really be important to customers? In a nutshell, it is called value-added service (Reilly, p. 57). This is service that concentrates on demonstrating desirable attitudes and behaviors when you are dealing with your customers. Most of what I am going to tell you is easy to do. Everyone in your organization can and should do these if you are at all serious about delivering outstanding customer service.

First, you need to know your organization’s values for doing business. Most organizations are known by these values and they guide the manner in which the work in your organization is done. I am talking about values like: integrity, service to others, compassion and respect for the customer, etc. These values are usually customer focused, framed and hung in a highly visible location such as in a lobby where your customers can easily see them. Are you familiar with your organization’s values? You should be because those values are the guidelines for how you treat your customers.

Second, develop an attitude of gratitude. This simply means having a passion for your customers, believing that they are truly assets to your organization. When you really put your customers first, you will automatically think and behave accordingly. You will actually begin to find ways to demonstrate to your customers how important they are to you and your organization.

Third, be proactive by anticipating and resolving your customer’s issues before they become real problems. This means never having to say you are sorry to your customers. To do that you will need to take the initiative to anticipate issues and take action to intervene before they occur.

Fourth, treat your customers, as they would like to be treated. Remember it’s the customer’s perception that counts, not yours. So…find out how your customer wants to be treated. Once you know what your customer’s want, your focus should then be to deliver that kind of service if at all possible.

Consider the following saying: Good Service Only Becomes Great Service When the Customer Says It’s Great! Do you know if your customers think you deliver “great service?” You can easily find out. Ask them!

Fifth, deal with customer issues on the spot! If you don’t feel you have the authority to do so, then you need to talk to your supervisor about getting that authority. Nothing irritates a customer more than having to wait to speak to a manager or a supervisor to get their problem resolved. If you feel you “can’t do anything” for your customer, you will add your frustration to the situation, which will only make it worse.

I suggest that you take a risk and do as much as you can for your customer. It’s called “do it now and get permission later.” I feel confident that your boss will understand as your actions are all sincerely done in the name of great customer service, right?

Last, promise a lot and deliver more. This means that you should always try to exceed your customers’ expectations. To exceed your customers’ expectations, you have to go the “extra mile” with them. Going the extra mile means putting forth a lot of effort; it means going out of your way to satisfy your customers with every encounter you have with them. It’s paying attention to details and giving them extra attention.

The rewards for all of your hard work will be a very happy customer who will undoubtedly return to your organization again and again.
Without question, consistent performance is what customers want most. More than anything else, the customer wants service that he can depend on. More specifically this means:

- Do what you say you are going to do
- Do it when you say you are going to do it.
- Do it right the first time.
- Get it done on time.

One of the easiest ways to incorporate all of the points included in value-added service is to create a Customer Bill of Rights, which can be highlighted in your organization by publishing it on business cards, on handouts, on posters, etc. to be hung on the walls of your organization. You will need to word them so they are customer focused such as: We deal with your problems and concerns immediately. You may want to add others based on the uniqueness of your organization.

If you are having trouble developing a Customer Bill of Rights you might want to consider what authors Zemke and Anderson (p. 8) state are the five (5) rating factors used by customers to rate service quality:

1. **Reliability**… the ability to provide what was promised, dependably and accurately. **Example:** When you meet a customer’s request on time, you demonstrate reliability.
2. **Assurance**… the knowledge and courtesy you show to customers, and your ability to convey trust, competence, and confidence.
3. **Tangibles**… the physical facilities and equipment, and your own and others’ appearance. **Example:** when you take the time to make yourself and your work area presentable, you are paying attention to tangibles.
4. **Empathy**… the degree of caring and individual attention you show customers.
5. **Responsiveness**… the willingness to help customers promptly.

Most of what you do for your customers probably fall into one of the above categories. Perhaps you can turn these five factors into a set of rights for your customers. What a nice way to show them how much you value them!
SO, HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME WITH THE RIGHT STUFF?

Well, this much is for certain. If you are going to work in a service organization, you need to have an ability to give and give and give. If that giving doesn’t come naturally to you, it’s not going to come.

Period.

So how do you know if you are a giver? There are some telltale signs (Gross, p. 201)

1. **Have you done any volunteer work?** Being a blood donor counts. Being a Brownie troop leader, PTA officer, Get Out the Vote or Walk-a-Thon participant counts too. Givers volunteer.

2. **Did you ever work professionally at a charity or volunteer to man a hot line?** Takers tend to avoid these types of involvements.

3. **Did you ever work professionally in a small company where you had to wear many hats?** Givers will help out wherever they are needed and in whatever capacity.

4. **Were you once a member of, or did you want a career in a “helping profession” like nursing, day care, or social work?** Givers tend to gravitate to these careers.

5. **Did you wait on tables?** What percentage of your pay did you average in tips? What did you think of the way customers treated you? You won’t perceive these customers as any better…believe me…no matter how much better these customers may appear to you. There is usually nothing that will change a taker’s mind about working with the public. They do not take to the public well.

6. **Did you serve in the military?** The armed services teach people to treat other people with respect (“yes sir”; “yes ma’am”) or at least deliver a convincing approximation of it.

7. **Did you ever deal with the public before?** What kind of experience was that? What was the worst and best day on the job? What would you have changed?

8. **What sacrifices have you made in your life?** If you have never sacrificed, you don’t know much about giving. And if you have sacrificed but are bitter about it, you do not know much about giving either. Givers sacrifice easily and readily. It’s a natural state of affairs for them.

9. **Do you serve with joy?** Givers do…all the time.

10. **Do you find fulfillment and meaning in serving others?** Takers do not.

A simple exercise that can be very telling is the following: Ask yourself the question: **If you have 25 customers in a row who have similar questions about an issue, how will you maintain interest in each customer?** Givers can come up with lots of different options; takers run out of them very quickly.

Another characteristic that divides the givers from the takers is their attitude towards their customers. Givers will automatically approach their customers while takers will do everything possible to avoid them.

Yet another characteristic that separates them is their focus while on the job. Givers will focus on providing service directly to their customers while takers focus mainly on the service process itself, i.e.,
the steps involved, etc. The result is that the taker limits his or her actual interaction time with the customer.

When one considers the fact that every interaction with a customer results in an impression that can win or lose a customer for life, who would you rather have working in your organization, a giver or a taker? Some of the most current information on what it takes to work successfully in a service job is very interesting. It is called “emotional intelligence” and has to do with author Daniel Goleman’s belief in his book titled Emotional Intelligence that those who have what he calls “people powers” and not “credentials” like college degrees are the successful employees in service industries. People-powers is a term that refers to one’s natural abilities to work with the public in a collaborative, personable and caring manner. A college degree does not guarantee this kind of competence, which is so necessary to exceptional customer service.

We’re talking about behaviors like cordially greeting customers, smiling, using a customer’s name, escorting customers to where they want to go, etc. Giving your customers personal, pleasing service requires a very special inclination for caring. Not everyone is suited to working with the public on a close intimate basis …remember the takers? To be good at customer service, you have to be part:

Ambassador, Negotiator, Advocate, Accountant, Administrator, Confidant, Detective, Guardian of the Company Coffers (the money), Nursemaid, Troubleshooter, Peacemaker, Teacher, Technocrat (skilled at using those computer data bases), Salesperson, and Gracious Host (Karr and Blohowiak, p.195)

Here is a little quiz you should take to see if “you” are strong enough to be a great person in a customer service oriented job (Gittomer, p. 215-216)

Rate yourself in each category from 1 (poor) to 10 (the greatest)…and see how great “you” are…put your numerical rating on the line before each item.

_____ 1. Your Image: How do you look?
_____ 2. Your ability to speak. Your ability to convey your message.
_____ 3. Your ability to establish rapport with others. Can you make a customer feel at ease?
_____ 4. Your attitude. Are you enthusiastic? Are you a positive plus person with others?
_____ 5. Your knowledge of your job and organization. Do you know it cold?
_____ 6. Your desire to help. Does your help side outweigh your greed side?
_____ 7. Your preparedness. Do you prepare for every customer?
_____ 8. Your humor. Can you make others laugh?
_____ 9. Your sincerity. Are you genuine?
_____10. Your creativity. Are you different from the rest? Can you generate a WOW reaction from those you serve? Just how creative are you?
_____11. Your reputation. Are you well known in your field, your organization?
_____12. Your glue. How well are you “put together?”
How did you score?
A perfect score is 120.
If you scored from 110-120 you are a great you!
100-109: Pretty damn good you. “Climbing the ladder and making daily progress.”
70-99: You aren’t as hot as you think. “You’re in need of a 20 minute personal daily workout.”
50-69: You’re mediocre at service, and so is your success to date. “You have a decision to make. Stay and get better every day, or get out before you’re fired, and blame someone else for all that’s wrong with you.”
30-49: You stink! “Go to the nearest bookstore, buy Dale Carnegie’s How to Win Friends and Influence People. Don’t leave home until you read it!”

HOW TO GET BETTER ‘N BETTER WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

One of the best ways to get better is to do that thing I called a paradigm shift earlier in this program. A paradigm shift means doing a complete “flip flop” in your thinking and actions. It means turning your entire focus away from the specifics of the service you are providing to the way in which you are providing it to your customers. ” Remember: You’re not doing customers a favor by serving them. They’re doing you a favor by giving you the opportunity to serve them. You should know your service so well that the process of providing it should be second nature to you. Now you can focus your energies on delivering what is called either “knock your socks off service” or my favorite term, “positively outrageous service (POS).” We could also call this kind of service customer-focused care.

Delivering outrageous service or customer focused care is what I mean by getting better ‘n better. This may mean that you will need to spend time re-thinking and re-prioritizing service as you now deliver it.

Remember a lot of organizations are providing the same services that your organization provides so what makes you any more memorable to your customer than they are?

Excellent Service isn’t the result of doing one thing 1,000 percent better. It’s the result of doing thousands of things 1 percent better.

(LeBoeuf, p. 80)

Because Positively Outrageous Service (POS) is the most involving, touching kind of service, trends now favor those organizations that serve outrageously. Digital Equipment Company’s Customer Service Department puts it another way: Customers don’t care what you know, until they know that you care.

Let me give you a simple example of POS by telling you a true story that truly focuses on a customer.

One cold morning, a businessman stopped by a local 7-11 for his usual cup of coffee. Normally, he got coffee at the Dunkin” Donuts, but it was frigid outside, and he couldn’t wait to travel the additional 8 blocks it would take to get there. Her name was Roberta. At least that was what her nametag said. Her total attention belonged to a tall, elderly gentleman who had placed his purchases on the counter. He stood as straight as possible, adjusted his collar and scarf and extended an extremely arthritic hand to her. Roberta slipped the handle of the plastic bag onto his wrist and waited for his other age-spotted hand to find its way to hers. She warmed his hands as tenderly as the businessman had ever witnessed, then calling the old
gentleman by his name, she smiled and said, “Be careful walking home in this snow. I want to see you here again tomorrow.” Not what the businessman expected from a 7-11! He said, “How come the special treatment? Are you related to him?” “No relation” came the reply. “He’s my customer.” Then she tossed her hair, smiled and said, “Oh thank heaven for 7-11.”

In her book titled Customers for Keeps, Geller defines customer service in this new millennium as “friendship branding”, a living, evolving experience between two people: the employee and the customer. It is the only book out there that shows you how to find and keep your customers by treating them like friends.

Geller offers 8 strategies to turn customers into friends and keep them forever. Here are 2 of the most critical of the 8 the author suggests:

- Relate to customers as you would to your best friends using the principles and rituals of friendship to create strong, long lasting relationships.
- Repair “broken” relationships so that they are stronger than ever.

I am adding a quote by Muhammad Ali about friendship that seems to expand upon this concept of “friendship branding.”

“Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It’s not something you learn in school. But if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you haven’t really learned anything.”

Muhammed Ali

Positively Outrageous Service is the story you can’t wait to tell. It is also unexpected service delivered at random. It is out of the ordinary and out of proportion to the circumstance. It is a memorable event and so unusual that customers feel compelled to tell others about the experience. It is the kind of service that creates lifetime customers (Gross, p. 1). What it means to me is that your customer is expecting good service but what he really wants is “an experience” or an “event.” Some words that further describe outrageous service are words like: fun, playful, surprising, entertaining, caring, and not necessary.

The word “unexpected” is probably the key definition of Positively Outrageous Service. It appears that the element of surprise and novelty that jolts the attention of your customer will create an experience or event that's memorable because it is so different from their expectation. We'll talk more about ways to deliver POS later. Let me leave you with the following anonymous poem that I think emphasizes the special kind of service that POS should be:

Service is a special joy
Not just a job to do.
At least that's the way it's meant to be
So say those folks with Woo.
Loving on customers can be a chore
Or a privilege…it depends.
On who's the server, who's the guest,
And the messages we send.
RE-ENGINEERING YOURSELF TO SERVE OUTRAGEOUSLY

Re-engineering yourself for customer-focused care is almost like getting a complete body makeover! Let’s begin by taking a hard look at your body language, okay? There is a wonderful little book in your local bookstore called Body Language by Julius Fast. In it, the author describes the messages we send through our non-verbal behavior, which includes our gestures, posture and body positioning. I highly recommend this textbook. It has been around for a long time and the content is just as valuable today as when it was written.

What kind of non-verbal messages are you sending to your customers? Do you look approachable, welcoming, interested and friendly to customers by standing or sitting in positions that indicate those qualities? These are positions where the arms are slightly flexed and outstretched with the hands held open with the palms up and kept above the waist most of the time. There is a conscious effort not to slouch or lean on objects or others. The head is held up and the shoulders back when possible and the customer is faced directly or head on during conversations.

It means frequently smiling and having eye contact with your customers and approaching them before they approach you. Wal-Mart actually has a rule that employees (called associates) are to look up, smile and ask “May I help you?” when a customer comes within 3 feet of them. I like that rule.

And what about your voice? Does it make a difference to your customers? Yes, it does. I suggest that you have someone tape you during a conversation when you do not know you are being taped. Evaluate your taped voice. Here is one tool you can use:

A VOICE STYLE CHECKLIST

| ✓ Your voice is easy to hear without being too loud. | ___ Yes___ No |
| ✓ Your words are clearly pronounced. | ___ Yes___ No |
| ✓ Your pacing is good - neither too slow nor too fast. | ___ Yes___ No |
| ✓ Your vocal tone is pleasant—neither grating nor nasal. | ___ Yes___ No |
| ✓ Your voice energy level shows interest and enthusiasm. | ___ Yes___ No |
| ✓ You make a conscious effort to keep a smile in your voice. | ___ Yes___ No |

Here are some tips to help you to achieve a desirable conversational voice. Minimizing or eliminating a monotone is possible once you are aware that you have one. It involves working to get inflection into your voice. Inflection can be incorporated into your voice by putting enthusiasm into your voice. In effect, putting emotion in your voice will give you inflection. One of the easiest ways to start getting some emotion into your voice is to smile while you are talking especially when you are on the phone.

Is your voice too high or low in pitch? Moderation in pitch is pleasing to the human ear. You may have to raise or lower your voice an octave to achieve a pleasing tone. Interestingly, the elderly respond better to a lower octave as their hearing of higher tones decreases naturally with aging.

How about the pacing of your words? A moderate pace is suggested as talking too fast or too slow can either result in the customer not being able to comprehend what you say or lose interest and not hear what you say. Thirty-six words per minute is a pace that is well received and understood. Over 60 wpm or under 20 wpm results in problems for the listener. And don’t forget about focusing on clearly
enunciating words that end in an n, r or d so that they are not misunderstood. Again, the elderly often cannot hear those words if they are not enunciated clearly.

In the Victorian Age, young ladies received instruction in the social graces, which included learning how to walk and sit appropriately and to speak with pleasing conversational voices. I sometimes wonder if we shouldn’t bring back that instruction so that we could all have positive posture, appealing stances and cultured, well-bred voices.

Once you have evaluated and practiced refining your conversational voice, have someone tape you again so that you can evaluate whether your focus on improving your voice has been successful. Good luck!

Well, now that you have achieved a pleasant and melodic voice, let’s use it professionally on the telephone. Would you believe that most people say that they spend about 35% of their work time on the telephone, yet few job descriptions include phone etiquette as a critical job skill. To make it even more astounding, you may talk to customers that you never see such as someone within your organization that works in another area of the building or in a separate satellite site miles away (an internal customer). Or you may frequently converse with an external customer over the phone for any number of reasons.

Considering how much time in spent on the telephone, I think an emphasis on telephone etiquette is in order as an intricate part of providing positive customer service. Below you will find a Telephone Technique Checklist Format for you to use to self-evaluate your phone skills before we address phone etiquette.

**TELEPHONE TECHNIQUE CHECKLIST FORMAT**

In this program, we will only be focusing on the very basics of positive phone etiquette which contain the following customer sensitive elements:

- Answering the phone,
- Taking messages,
- Putting a caller “on hold,”
- Transferring calls.

Let’s address **Answering the Phone** first.

The best greeting when one initially* answers the phone contains three (3) elements.

1. A Greeting, such as “Hello” or “Good Morning”… because some phone systems cut off the first word of a conversation, a greeting protects the second element of the answering response which is:

2. The Identification Statement…telling the caller who he or she has reached. * Some phone etiquette gurus feel that the caller should identify their role or title in the organization as well. This can be problematic if your title is long and contains highly technical terms such as this title: Technological Phlebotomy Consultant

3. Finally, the Question, which asks how you can be of assistance.

* Note: any ringing phone should be answered by the third ring; otherwise, your customer feels neglected or worse yet that you are not really all that interested in his business.
Second, let’s discuss **Taking Phone Messages**. There are actually four (4) elements to this process:

1. Get the caller’s full name, organization name (if appropriate) and phone number where the caller can be reached.

2. To be sure you have the correct spelling of the caller’s name and an accurate phone number where he or she can be reached, read them back to the caller and ask for confirmation.

3. Date and time the message.

4. Put your full name and any other identifying credentials you feel is necessary on the message so the recipient can ask you for any needed information or clarification.

*Using a pre-printed form for taking phone messages is recommended. A phone log pad and a pen should be available for use at all organizational phones where business is conducted. Remember, some organizations store phone logs, as evidence in litigation so maintaining accuracy in the foregoing four (4) elements is important.*

Third, let’s explore the best way to **Put a Caller “On Hold.”** There are only two (2) elements to the recommended approach.

1. Never put a caller “on hold” without first asking his permission to do so. Wait for his answer. It creates a positive impression of you and your organization.

2. If the caller can’t or won’t hold, take a number and call back ASAP.

Last, let’s discuss **Transferring Calls.** This approach contains four (4) elements too.

1. Transfer calls only as a last resort.

2. Be sure to give the name and number of the person you are transferring to the caller in case there are any problems with the connection. Do not tell the caller that you are giving them the extension in case there are problems. Doing so would give the caller the impression that problems routinely occur in your organization when calls are transferred.

3. Stay on the line until the transfer goes through.
4. Always talk about the customer in respectful terms while transferring to another person. Never assume your customer cannot hear you simply because he or she is supposed to be “on hold” during the actual transfer.

**A winning way to transfer a call using the foregoing four (4) elements is:**

“Mr. Customer, I am going to have to transfer you to Etta Etiquette in the Service Department regarding your request on the status of your bill. She is at extension 420. I will put you through to her now.”

Transfers the call to E. Etiquette.

“Etta, I’m transferring a call from Mr. Customer to you. He would like a current update on his bill.”

*(Stays on the phone until she hears them talking).*

As we conclude this section of our program on the basics of positive phone etiquette, I would like to leave you with some parting overall thoughts from others about using the phone:

- When you answer the phone, your organization’s image is on the line.

  A headline in Video Business magazine

- If I pick up a ringing phone, I accept the responsibility to ensure the caller is satisfied, no matter what the issue.

  Michael Ramundo, President
  MCR Marketing, Inc.

Throughout this program we have been alluding to the importance of one’s attitude in working with customers. I think we’re ready to talk more in depth about attitude now. It was Olympic skater Scott Hamilton who said that the only debilitating disease is a bad attitude (Karr and Blowiak, p.63).

We have a choice each day how we are going to treat our customers. Our words only constitute 7% of the image our customers receive from us; 55% of what they receive from us is our non-verbal behavior (Karr and Blowiak p. 63-64). With that in mind, here are some very “bottom line” guidelines to remember when dealing with your customers. They convey that you are glad they came to your organization for service (Karr and Blowiak, p. 68).

- The tone of your voice is a “dead give-away as to how you really feel about your customer.
- Your gestures and actions also give your customer a clear picture of how you feel about him.
- Words can help you and words can kill you.
- Your customers will usually agree, collaborate and cooperate with you as long as they know why you are asking them to do something.

Now that you have the attitude that it takes to satisfy your customers, I am going to help you to become a customer service Energizer Bunny which means that you are going to “go the extra mile” with your customers from now on. What that means is that you are going to go beyond satisfying your customer…you are going to create what authors Blanchard and Bowles (p. 13) call “raving fans.” To me the term “raving fan” conjures up images of those wild and woolley grandstand fans at the Nascar events. It is obvious that these fans are thrilled. They yell, gesture wildly and exhibit all manner of behaviors to
indicate how much they care about their favorite “race car driver.” These are the kinds of fans you want your customers to be. How can you get that kind of “over the top” adoration and loyalty?

My answer to that question is to focus on the details of delivering Positively Outrageous Service (POS).

Stories of Positively Outrageous Service will be the success stories of the millennium, but only a few organizations will actually serve outrageously and those organizations will be the memorable ones…they will be the ones everyone can tell a story about that will top all the other stories.

Words to describe POS are surprise, fun, unexpected, not necessary, playful, caring, entertaining, and outrageous. Not all of these words will apply every time to every situation. To me the person who delivers POS is indeed the Energizer Bunny, the one who creates memorable experiences for both internal and external customers.

So let’s get down to the “nitty gritty,” focusing on some real concrete things that you can do.

- **Do the random and unexpected**… add an element of surprise and novelty that “jolts” the attention of your customer and creates an experience that’s memorable and different from what is expected. Knowing that you can’t possibly do the outrageous all of the time, keep your customers guessing by doing it only on occasion.

  Note: Random rewards beget regular behavior. For example a free dinner given to a couple randomly in a restaurant on a Tuesday evening might just cause the couple to continue to patronize an out of the way restaurant on another Tuesday evening (usually a stay at home night) on the off chance that they just might once again…eat for free.

- **Do something out of proportion to the circumstances**… take the above scenario and make it “out of proportion” by giving everyone who comes into the restaurant on a Tuesday night a free dinner once a month…everyone! Just suppose that everyone meant 200 customers on that particular evening.

- **Invite your customer or client to play or be otherwise involved**… some businesses have a built-in advantage. Their customers are already “in fun”: when they arrive like at the baseball stadium.

  Note: Being in fun means showing up with the mind set that as a customer you can be comfortable and have a great time.

  Smart operators of any business look for opportunities to invite their customers to play. It may be as simple as asking your customers for their opinions or to share their feelings or their ideas. It might be involving people in sharing their perceptions via a comment book or framing pictures of groups of clients and hanging them on the wall where service is delivered or in a marketing brochure or using them as actors/actresses in an educational video for your facility.

  Note: Being invited to “play” makes customers feel welcome…think about it! Usually asking one customer to “play” will cue another one to join in the fun.

- **Create customer loyalty (hopefully forever)**… this comes from making customers feels at home, like family by remembering their names and something personal about them.

- **Create compelling word of mouth**… by making your service so unusual that your customers will feel compelled to go home and talk about it to at least 4-6 other people. Customers are known to ignore clutter, tolerate less than comfortable surroundings when they receive unusual service.
Note: Remember, both internal and external customers want an experience wherever and whenever they seek service. You can provide that event for them by “going the extra mile.”

Let’s get even more specific. Consider novel solutions to common customer problems, consider things that the customer is likely to wear or display and focus on the unexpected.

- **Do your customers need help using your service?** Is there something novel you could do to assist your customers in using your services? Is there an interesting, perhaps fun way to package your services? Could you make a show out of delivering your services?

- **How do your customers arrive at your worksite?** Is there a novel way to receive your customers? Is there something unique you could do to make your customers waiting time more pleasant? Can you think of something outrageous to do with parking or traffic? Can you make a game out of any aspect of your service?

- **What could you do that would be considered “out of proportion?”** First, think about what is “normal” and then how you could go overboard. If a restaurant could earn your attention by serving a complimentary dessert, it would be out of proportion to offer an entire meal as a complimentary gesture. What kind of move or action would be comparable in your operation?

- **What other facilities, businesses, or service organizations share an interest in your organization’s success?** Who wants you to succeed? How can they contribute expertise, facilities, services or dollars to your POS plan or approaches? How can you apply this concept in your work area?

- **What related businesses are good candidates for co-marketing?** Who else wants to be involved? Think of those organizations that share your customers, but not your services. These make terrific co-marketing partners and may be found in areas you would never expect. **Example:** a local hospital approached a local community college to co-promote a health fair with them. The hospital wants the community to come to them for services and the college wants their business too. There is no conflict...both organizations have the same goal.

- **What local events, charities, or groups are candidates for an outrageous promotion?** Discovering ideas for outrageous service to the community means getting involved by sharing your expertise and providing education. Letting the community use your facility conference rooms for monthly meetings is a good way of getting local people involved in your organization…it brings them into your facility where they can get familiar with it. The result is usually a future customer of your services when it is needed. For example:

  A hospital allowed a local woman’s investment group to use one of its conference rooms. Since women make the majority of health care decisions including where the family seeks medical care, you can see the logic of such a move by the hospital.

  Some other ideas for delivering positively outrageous service to either your internal or external customers are even more detailed and include the following:

  - Send cards for special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
  - Have a “service blitz”...one day every three (3) months when everyone gets on the phone and calls a set number of customers to thank them for their business.
• Visit the customer in person when it makes sense to do so (for external customers it may mean only when they are somewhere in your facility for some kind of service.

• Say thanks orally, in writing or by sending gifts of appreciation (which do not need to be expensive but rather unique).

• Ask customers what they expect or want from you.

• Hold open houses for customers and make the refreshments memorable.

• Make the customer a hero 365 days a year.

• Offer free good or samples that will help your customers in some way.

• Keep customers informed of changes in policies and rules; give them plenty of notice.

• Send congratulations for customer or their extended families’ achievements such as graduations, promotions, etc.

• Be easily accessible even if it means giving out home phone numbers for emergencies.

• Have a hot line for “hot” customers.

• Refer business to your customers who are in business.

• Have a monthly “give away” lunch or dinner raffle...put customer names in a fishbowl.

• Verbally and within earshot of others, compliment your customers.

• Offer no charge favors of service if possible.

• Develop a newsletter for customers and offer them an option to contribute where indicated (client corner)

• Send customers articles of interest to them.

• Ask often, “What is the most I can do for you today?”

• Return phone calls promptly...within 4 hours (maximum) of the received call.

• Play the game of “guess how many jelly beans or M&Ms are in the jar” and give the jar to the winner. This is a great idea to use in a waiting room. Customers get to know each other by passing around the jar and estimating the number inside. It goes over well at holidays. You can use candy corn for Halloween, red and green M&Ms for Christmas and so on.

• One doctor’s office had a produce “give away table” in their waiting room. Staff brought in vegetables and flowers from their gardens and encouraged clients to take some home for free. This was well received especially by elderly clients on a fixed income. What a healthy unexpected treat!

• Conduct monthly customer satisfaction surveys.

Some would say that doing the above things overextends an organization so that they cannot do their regular work, but to me it is a way of doing your job so well that customers keep coming back sometimes for the rest of their lives.
Consider the twenty-five (25) service actions ranked in order of importance by customers as yet another source of ideas of how to deliver positively outrageous service. They are:

1. Being called back when promised.
2. Receiving an explanation of how a problem happened.
3. Providing information so they know what number(s) to call.
4. Being contacted promptly when a problem is resolved.
5. Being able to talk to someone in authority.
6. Being told approximately how long it will take to solve a problem.
7. Being given useful alternatives if a problem can’t be solved.
8. Being treated like a person, not an account number.
10. Being given progress reports if a problem can’t be solved immediately.
11. Ability to talk without being interrupted.
12. Not being “put on hold” without being asked permission.
13. Being treated with appreciation for their business.
14. Having an actual person answer calls.
15. Being told responsible staff member’s names and phone numbers.
16. Getting through on the first call.
17. Offered suggestions on how to keep costs down.
18. Ability to speak with someone on the first call that can solve the problem.
19. Receiving an apology when an error has been made.
20. Being helped without having to be put “on hold.”
21. Having the phone answered by the 3rd ring.
22. Being greeted with “Hello” or “Good Morning.”
23. Being able to reach the organization after 4 pm.
24. Being addressed by name.
25. Being able to reach the organization before 8:30 am.
It’s your turn now! Take some time and think about your internal and external customers. What specific things could you do that would demonstrate that you are trying to go the “extra mile?” What could you do that would make your customer tell 4-6 other people about that experience?

Remember, any service transaction can be evaluated in terms of quality, accuracy, speed and show. Give anyone a quality service, delivered to their liking, do it quickly, and you’ve got a perfect picture of a well-oiled, efficient organization.

But, involve them in the process and make the service an experience and you’ve got the “touch of showmanship” that will make you more than outstanding… you’ll stand out!!! I’d like to conclude this part of the program with an anonymous poem that seems to put in a few words everything I have been trying to say about delivering positively outrageous service.

*The best kind of service ever given*

*Is random, unexpected.*

*If you’re kind of crazy, you’re just right.*

*In fact, you’ve been elected.*

Positively Outrageous Service is the kind of Thing That once started gets contagious And that’s the part that makes work fun When service gets outrageous

And how about these statements?

- **The things that impress you and causes you to do more business with an organization are the same things that will impress your customers and encourage their return.**
- **If you promise a lot and deliver more, you will always have satisfied customers!**
- **If you exceed your customers’ expectations, you will always have satisfied customers!**
- **What this all means everyone is that you are really going to have to work at delivering exceptional customer service. A recent survey in Sale and Marketing Management magazine concluded that:**
  - 25% of people are in a Comfort Zone at work…maybe (don’t laugh) in a parking zone.
  - 57% are on the fence.
  - Only 18% really test their potential.

I encourage you to: **Blast Out of Your Comfort Zone** when it comes to your customer service and try some of the suggestions for delivering “knock your socks off “ service. Good luck!!!

I know what you’ve probably been thinking. What about those customers who never seem to be pleased or those who are angry and obnoxious from the moment you first have contact with them. I am sure you want to know what to do for them or about them, right? Maybe you feel that no matter what you do to deliver outstanding customer service, it never, ever seems to work with these challenging clients. In fact I’ll bet the following says it all for you.

“There are no “bad” customers; some are just harder to please than others.”

*Quote from someone who has never served a customer in his life*
Was I right? Did I get a smile out of you? I hope so because you need a sense of humor and willingness to give an upset client the benefit of the doubt if you are to successfully work with them. I have a brief approach that may help you deliver that outrageous customer service that we have been discussing to challenging persons.

**See No Evil, Hear No Evil**

- If you start thinking of these challenging customers as “jerks and idiots, before you know it, you'll start treating them as badly as they are treating you. Maintain your perspective and think optimistically…perhaps this is just a bad day.

- Customer from “hell-o there” feed on your reactions. They will use your responses to them to justify their own obnoxious behavior. Maintain your pleasant demeanor.

- Ignoring their crude, rude and derogatory remarks and actions send the message that they can slam, bang and curse all they want, you are not going to be intimidated…that you are going to remain the adult in the encounter.

  **Note:** Don’t quote your organization’s rules or policies to the customer from hell to justify your actions…it just gives them something concrete to yell about.

**Surface the Tension**

- Angry, temper-tantrum-throwing customers are so wrapped up in their emotions that they often forget that you are a living, feeling person.

- “Surface the tension” is a way to gently remind them.

- Try saying: “Have I personally done something to upset you?” Or you could try, “I’d really like to help you. Please give me a chance.” This last phrase usually works real magic because most people will give you a chance.

- “Surfacing the Tension” is an approach that usually helps return the irate customer’s focus back to the issue, encouraging him to vent about the problem, not the person.

  **Note:** Be prepared for the customer who answers “Yes, you have upset me.” (a rare occurrence). Find out why and correct the problem or misperception to the best of your ability. Always be sincere.

**Transfer Transformation**

- There are times when you are not obligated to continue on with an obnoxious customer…when you have been shocked, offended or dismayed by language or behavior.

- Transferring the customer to someone he or she can or wants to continue on with is not a cop out… it is a way to move beyond a customer’s negative, nasty behavior.

- During the transfer, the customer goes thru an “adult time out” and is able to hopefully leave a temper tantrum behind with you and start fresh in an adult fashion with the new contact.

**Build Contractual Trust**

- For the customer who refuses to be transferred, continues to threaten you verbally and begins to physically abuse you with fists in your face or pushing and/or shoving:
“Make positive eye contact, smile, and say, “I’m sorry but unless we can find another way to have this conversation that doesn’t involve abusive language or physical contact, I am going to have to call Security.”

Note: Use “I” statements not “you” statements.

“You” statements create resentment and abusiveness.

“I” statements clearly communicate that you need a customer to stop a particular behavior because you can’t accept it. **Example:** “I can’t talk to you when you are shouting and yelling at me. It’s scary and makes me very uncomfortable. I will be glad to talk to you when you stop yelling and shouting.”

This has been a very brief discussion on challenging customers but helpful, I hope. I would like to leave you with some parting thoughts:

*Look for the gifts…the things that every unpleasant encounter can teach you about dealing with ugly human behavior.*

*Rebecca Morgan*
*Morgan Seminar Group*

*The things that frustrate and alienate you as a customer are the very same things that frustrate and alienate your customers.*

*Anonymous*

We have covered a lot of information on customer service. I hope you have enjoyed the journey. To end this program I would like to invite you to develop a personal action plan right now based on all that you have learned about customer service.

**PERSONAL ACTION PLAN**

**Directions:** List five (5) actions that you plan to do in order to deliver better customer service where you work. Be specific and realistic given the unique nature of your organization and your particular work area.

1. ________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________
4. ________________________________________________________
5. ________________________________________________________
And I am also going to invite you to read and sign the pledge below as your commitment to delivering exceptional customer service.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE PLEDGE**

| This is my pledge to deliver exceptional customer service while I am an employee here at ________________________________ (Name of your organization). |
| In doing so, I'm going to contribute my part in making a real difference. |
| Signature______________________________________ |
| Date__________________________________________ |

It’s time for me to say goodbye. I would like to conclude with a thank-you letter (Anderson and Zemke, p. 115) from a customer who demonstrated his customer satisfaction in a positively outrageous way.

Paul Olson was so pleased with what doctors at the Mayo Clinic did to help save his life, he rented a billboard to thank them.

Olson’s thank you note is hard to miss in downtown Rochester, MN, home of the renowned clinic on the prairie. It’s a dramatic $800 message on a 12x25 foot billboard:

“**Dear Mayo Clinic: Thanks for the Five Years of Life… A Surviving Cancer Patient.”**

Olson, president of the Blandin Foundation in Grand Rapids, MN, said the message carries “my effort at public education,” as well as his gratitude to medical workers who sometimes think that their tasks are thankless.

Olson was 47 in 1992 when the clinic caught his prostrate cancer through a prostrate specific antigen blood test, which some insurers have resisted covering for men under 50 because it sometimes produces false-positive readings.

“I am eternally grateful to Mayo for practicing medicine their way, and not the way of the insurance companies,” said Olson. “If you catch it early, young guys, old guys can be just fine... We’ve got to get more guys into routine checking.”

Mayo spokesman John La Forgia said the thank-you billboard is a first for Rochester as far as he knows, and has become a conversation piece at the clinic.

“It certainly makes people feel good that a patient was so pleased with his care here,” he said.

Contributed by Robert Franklin

Excerpted from Minneapolis Star (May 18, 1997)
Jane, recently married was having lunch with a friend and explaining why she married Bill instead of Bob. “Bob is Mr. Everything,” Jane said. “He’s handsome, well educated, extremely intelligent, clever, and has a very successful career. In fact, when I was with Bob I felt like I was with the most wonderful person in the world.”

“Then why did you marry Bill?” her friend asked.

Jane replied, “Because when I’m with Bill, I feel like I’m the most wonderful person in the world.”

Note: The above story illustrates the most important key to customer service quality. This isn’t to say that other factors such as looking your best and being well mannered aren’t important, because, of course, they are. But the most effective way to make a positive and lasting impression is to concentrate on boosting your customer’s self image.

Leo Burnett says it better and hopefully will leave you with a thought that will encourage you to recognize the critical value of giving your customers a boost to their self-image whenever you can do so:

“Don’t tell me how good you make it; tell me how good it makes me when I use it.”
REFERENCES:


Multiple Choice:

Directions: Circle the best answer.

1) All of the following are definitions of customer service with one exception:
   a) Focusing on the customer instead of the product or service being provided.
   b) Helping the customer appreciate the rationale for service quality goals.
   c) Making the customer feel appreciated.
   d) Feeling and acting accountable for the customer's satisfaction.

2) Your co-worker is which one of your customers?
   a) Intrinsic
   b) Eternal
   c) Internal
   d) External

3) Customer satisfaction surveys should be conducted:
   a) Annually
   b) Quarterly
   c) Monthly
   d) Daily

4) To ensure that your customers are satisfied, you should:
   a) Take a customer service program.
   b) Frequently ask, “How can I help you?”
   c) Exceed their expectations.
   d) Learn everything there is to know about your product or service.

5) Which of the following statements indicates a person who is well suited to a customer service job?
a) Turns around and goes the opposite way whenever a customer appears.

b) Approaches customers with a smile, initiates conversation and offers assistance.

c) Delays answering the phone if involved on the computer.

d) Finds opportunities to decrease time spent with customers.

6) All of the following are true about phone etiquette except:

a) A ringing phone should be answered by the 3rd ring.

b) Answering the phone with “hello” is sufficient.

c) Never put a person “on hold” without their permission, even if you are busy with a customer.

d) Transferring a call should only be done as a last resort.

7) Select the phone greeting that is appropriate:

a) Say “hello” and wait for the caller to speak, then ask, “What can I do for you?”

b) Say “hello” give you name and wait for the caller to speak.

c) Say hello, give your complete name and title, the name of your organization, then ask, “how can I help you?”

d) Say “hello”, then tell the caller that he or she will have to wait until you get someone else to talk to them.

8) All of the following are appropriate ways to deal with difficult customers except which one?

a) Say, “I’d like to help you. Please give me a chance to do that.”

b) Say, I am sorry but our policy doesn’t allow me to do anything about this problem.”

c) Offer to transfer them to someone else who can help if they refuse to work with you.

d) If someone is verbally or physically aggressive, say, “I can’t talk to you when you are shouting and trying to push me. If you will stop, I can try to help you.”
9) Indicate which of the following are good ideas for creating loyalty or repeat visits from your customers:

1. Have a hot line for "hot" customers
2. Offer free products or samples when possible
3. Say “thanks” verbally, in writing, or by sending gifts of appreciation
4. Ask often, “What is the most that I can do for you today?”

a) 1 and 2  
b) All of above  
c) 3 and 4  
d) None of the above

10) A satisfied customer will tell his story to how many other people.

a) 4 - 6  
b) 1 - 2  
c) 8 - 10  
d) 10 – 20

**True and False:**

Directions: Circle **T** for True or **F** for False in the following questions. Completely erase any errors.

**T** **F** 11. One of the top 25 service actions that customers rank as very important is being addressed by their name.

**T** **F** 12. If your job is not serving the customer, then you had better be serving someone who is.

**T** **F** 13. Good service only becomes great service when the organization says it’s great!

**T** **F** 14. Customers do not want an experience wherever and whenever they seek service…they just want the service.

**T** **F** 15. The first impressions that customers get are the most lasting.
Your opinion is important to us. Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best represents your experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE OBJECTIVES &amp; CONTENT</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The activity was valuable in helping me achieve the stated learning objectives.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The content was up to date.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The number of credit hours was appropriate for the content.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<th>TEACHING/LEARNING METHODS</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. The teaching/learning methods, strategies, and slides were effective in helping me learn.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5. The material was clearly explained.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The answers to the post-test questions were appropriately covered in the activity.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<th>OVERALL ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>7. The online course/download supported the achievement of the stated learning objectives.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The material was relevant to my professional development.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>9. Overall, I am pleased with this activity and would recommend it to others.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The content was presented free of commercial bias. *</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td>11. Did the material presented increase your knowledge and/or understanding of this topic? *</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td>NA</td>
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Continued on Next Page
* If you responded “No” to question 10, please explain why:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

* If you answered “Yes” to question 11, what change do you intend to make?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What barrier, if any, may prevent you from implementing what you learned?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Cite one new piece of information you learned from this activity:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Additional comments/suggestions:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

With my signature I confirm that I am the person who completed this independent educational activity by reading the material and completing this self evaluation.

Signature _________________________________ Date: __________________________
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WRITTEN PROGRAM REGISTRATION FORM/ORDER FORM

Date: ____________________

Name & Title: ___________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________

City: ____________________  State: _____   Zip: _____________________________

License No. (Required for Florida): __________________________________________________________________

Email: _________________________________________________________________

Employer: __________________________________________________________________

(W) # _________________  (H) # _________________  (F) # _________________

Have you registered with us before?  ____ Yes     ______  No

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Paying By: _____ Check   _____ Credit Card    _____ Money Order   _____ Cash

Credit Card Number: ________________________________________ Exp. Date___________

Cardholders Name: ________________________________ Sec. Code ____________