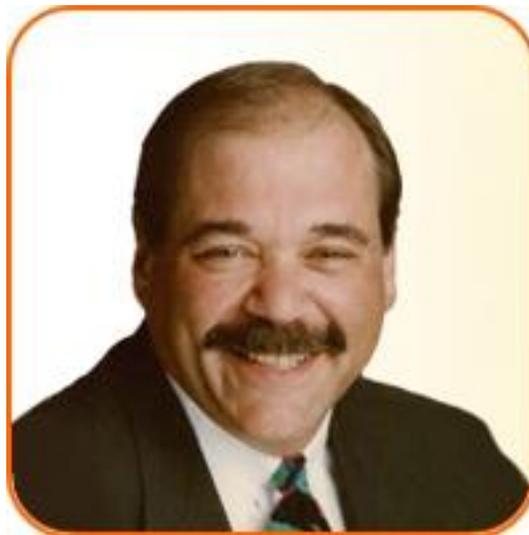


Ten Secrets of Extraordinary Customer Service

Great customer service can set a retail business apart.



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Great customer service can set a retail business apart. However, if you were to ask ten people what great customer service is, you would get ten different answers. In this report I list the ten most common ways that customers define extraordinary customer service. Actually, there are eleven ways not ten. I did that specifically to teach the point that real customer service gives that little extra unexpected bonus.

1. Thank Your Customer for Coming In

Over the years, I have tried almost every possible opening line from “Can I help you?” to “How are you doing?” I now believe that there is only one way to go, and that is “Thanks for coming in.” It’s effective because it aligns with the customer’s thinking. When customers walk into your store, they believe that they are giving you an opportunity to sell to them.

Thanking your customers for coming in is the ultimate greeting. You’re not just saying hello; you’re acknowledging, on a fundamental level, that you’re happy to see them, thrilled that they’ve come to see you, and grateful for their presence. Everyone likes to be acknowledged and appreciated. Why not start the customer’s experience off on a high note by making them feel both welcome and valued?

2. Know and Use Your Customer’s Name

Greeting your customer by name and using her name throughout your time together is great customer service. What could be more personal? You’re demonstrating interest in the customer - you know who she is and what she likes to be called.

The better you know your customer, the better job you will do providing him customer service. Knowing his name is just the first step. Develop a relationship with him to the point where you’re able to anticipate what types of products and merchandise will appeal to him and make recommendations accordingly.

3. Anticipate What Someone Wants To Buy

The better you know your customer, the better job you will do providing him customer service. Knowing his name is just the first step. Develop a relationship with him to the point where you're able to anticipate what types of products and merchandise will appeal to him and make recommendations accordingly.

4. Give Each Customer Unique Service

Every single one of your customers is a unique individual who comes to you with her own perspective, experiences, and thoughts. Providing customer service to such a diverse group means paying attention to many different factors. One customer may want your sales staff to know absolutely everything about a given piece of merchandise, while another is more concerned about the fact that you'll gift wrap and ship purchases.

5. Let Them Like You!

Be likeable! We all like to be around friendly, happy people. When you're around someone who's upbeat and cheerful, you tend to feel better. That's a concrete way to improve the customer's experience in your store. When your customer comes in and sees smiling faces, when the sales staff is friendly and chatty while helping him select merchandise, when the cashier compliments what he's chosen to purchase (and, by extension, his taste) it all adds up to a warm, likeable atmosphere. That atmosphere will bring your customer back.

6. Meet and Exceed Customer Expectations

We have all heard this customer service mantra for years. But when was the last time you had a meeting with your employees or did a focus group or survey of your customers to determine what they expect when coming into your store? When you know that, it becomes easy to exceed their expectations.

Understand what your customer expects from your store. This is an essential part of your brand: What mental image does the customer have when she hears your store name? Great customer service means providing the experience to meet that mental picture, and then going the extra mile to provide more.

7. Reach Your Customers on an Emotional Level

To truly provide great customer service, you need to connect with your customers on an emotional level. You have to know and understand what motivates your customers, what will resonate with them, and what type of emotional response they'll have to given situations.

Community involvement, signage, holiday and seasonal promotions, and even the choice of merchandise that you feature will help you forge that emotional connection with your customer. When you demonstrate to the customer that the things that are important to them are also important to you, you're forming an emotional bond.

8. Remember That Signage Is Great Service

We don't often think about it, but signage is really great customer service. The signs that help your customer find the store easily, the signs that identify sale merchandise, the sign that helps the customer locate what he's looking for, the sign that points out the bathroom, the sign that lets the customer know that he can use a certain credit card - all of these signs allow the customer to enjoy the shopping experience without having to ask any questions.

Good signs help sell merchandise. You'll realize higher margins with good signs. But the primary purpose of signage is to make the customer's life easy. That's great customer service.

9. Keep in Touch with Your Customers

We can't take loyalty for granted anymore. We must earn it every day. Keeping in touch with your customers is not just telling them about a sale. It is informing them about merchandise and events of interest to them. It's also educating customers and informing them about changes that may take place in your store or your industry. Sometimes, it's just a friendly reminder that a certain type of merchandise they like has come in.

10. Educate Your Customers

Every time your customers come into your store, they should have the opportunity to leave as smarter people. Information is the hottest commodity going: People value the opportunity to learn.

Every retailer should offer seminars or classes on topics of interest to their customers. These classes don't have to be directly tied to the merchandise you sell, although they can be. Make sure your sales staff is informed about your merchandise and able to advise customers knowledgeably. You can even provide education with signage using signs to explain benefits, teach how to use a product, or explain the difference between similar products.

11. Focus on Store Layout and Organization

Have you ever gone into a store knowing it sells what you want, only to get frustrated because you cannot find it? That's bad service! How your store is laid out and organized says a lot about your dedication to customer service. Can customers find what they want easily? Can they make their way down the aisles without having to navigate around awkward displays? Do you have logical departments, where customers can locate what they came for without having to devote a lot of time and thought to the process?

A store that makes it easy for customers to find what they want - a store that's organized, carefully laid out, and designed with the shopper in mind - is a store that's providing great customer service.