



The Customer Communicator Web Extra



What skills do you need to succeed ?

Advanced technical skills and excellent people skills are both essential in the service center.

According to John A. Goodman, author of *Customer Experience 3.0*, while advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, and avatars are definitely on the horizon, in most organizations there will still be a place for thoughtful and competent customer service reps.

Even at companies where advanced self-service technologies can handle basic customer service questions and issues, there are still going to be more complex issues that require a live rep. And there are always going to be some customers who want to speak to a live rep whatever their question.

In general, Goodman suggests that reps keep the following issues in mind when thinking about developing their skills:

■ Because reps will be handling the simple, basic issues that slip by self-service, as well as the more difficult issues that self-service can't handle, they are going to have to know a lot more about everything to do with their company's products and services. Many companies are also using more sophisticated knowledge-management systems to store that information, and "reps are going to have to become much more adept at using these technical tools to find the information that customers need," he says.

■ Goodman suggests that customer service reps are going to have to get better at identifying

the customer's level of expertise in the first few moments of the call. Being able to identify the customer's skill set quickly will help the rep to determine what resources are necessary to resolve the customer's issue.

■ Another skill reps will have to develop is the ability to educate the customer. "Learning how to teach customers — having those pedagogical skills — is going to be important," Goodman says.

Besides learning to use the technical tools that are available to resolve customer issues, Goodman says that the customer service rep of the future will have to be much more adept at reading the customer — not only to determine their level of technical expertise, but also to be able to create emotional connections with the customer.

In short, you don't want a customer to get past the self-service element on the website to reach a live rep who has less personality than that self-service avatar or cartoon character.

"The basic point," Goodman says, "is that you are going to have to be able to read the customer quickly to learn two things. One is, what is the customer's level of sophistication or knowledge in terms of this particular product. And two, is this someone I should connect with on an emotional level, and how should I do that?"

