



# SkillSharpener Web Extra

## Good reps will have the right words for every occasion

Not every customer encounter is going to work out positively. Customers can be angry, rude, melodramatic, uncertain, confused, and non-communicative, and they don't always agree with your suggestions, says Renée Evenson, a customer service trainer and author of *Powerful Phrases for Effective Customer Service*.

But Evenson believes that reps can be better prepared for customer encounters of all types if they know the right phrases to use both for general, everyday situations — welcoming phrases, and phrases to build rapport or express appreciation, for example — and for particularly challenging customer situations.

### Matching the words to the situation

Often, just providing a warm welcome to customers can help get a customer interaction off on the right foot, even with customers who might otherwise be upset or difficult.

Evenson suggests that customer encounters start with a pleasant "Welcome," "Good morning!" or "Thank you for calling ABC Company! My name is Mary." Other welcoming phrases include: "How may I help you?" "What can I help you with today?" or "Can I help you find something?"

"Offering a warm welcome to your customers helps break the ice, helps the customer begin forming a positive impression of you, and helps to create an atmosphere of comfort," Evenson says. "And if your company has a standard greeting, add

a phrase of welcome to personalize the greeting. Even when a customer shows by their tone of voice or facial expression that they are less than congenial, it's still the reps job to welcome them."

In addition to welcoming phrases, customer service reps should also incorporate phrases of courtesy into their contacts with customers.

Phrases of courtesy that should be a part of every rep's normal vocabulary include "Please," "Thank you," "You're welcome," "Excuse me, I didn't hear what you said," "Sir," "Ma'am," and "Yes" rather than "Yeah." Reps should also use phrases like,

### Showing appreciation

"Telling customers that you appreciate them in a sincere manner communicates a powerful, positive message," says Evenson. So, after handling a problem, listening to a customer complaint, closing a sale, or simply completing a transaction, reps should let the customer know that they value his or her patience and cooperation by using phrases like:

- "We appreciate your business,"
- "That's a great suggestion, thanks,"
- "I'm glad I was able to help you,"
- "What else can I help you with?,"
- "Thank you so much for calling,"
- "Please come (or call) again,"
- "We hope to see you again soon."





"I'll check and be right back," "Will you hold a moment while I check on that?" and "Thanks for waiting," when they have to ask the customer to wait or to hold the line.

Customer service reps should also be ready with phrases of assurance for customers. These include phrases like: "I'm going to take care of this right now," "Let me see what happened so I can correct that for you," "I'm going to get you to the department that can help, and I'll stay on the line until they answer," and "I'll make sure that this doesn't happen again."

Whenever a customer comes to your organization with a problem or an issue that needs to be resolved, Evenson adds, "the first words out of the rep's mouth should always include a phrase of regret — like, 'I'm sorry that happened' — followed by an assurance of help. Saying 'I'm sorry' is a great way to break the ice and let the customer know that you feel for what they are going through."

### Matching actions to words

In addition to having the right phrases handy, however, reps also need to have the right attitude and

tone of voice to go along with the phrases. "Actions do speak louder than words," Evenson says, "so if a rep says, 'I'm sorry that happened,' but says it flippantly or indifferently, or is paying attention to something else, then the customer isn't going to get the intended message."

The rep's tone and behavior should support the key message that they are paying attention to the customer.

### Practice makes perfect

"Often these phrases and these behaviors don't come naturally, but if reps practice them, and get into the habit of using them in all of their conversations with customers, then they will become second nature," says Evenson.

You can even put together a little "cheat sheet" for reps to refer to when needed. Write down the phrases that work well in certain situations — whether in general situations like making a good first impression or building rapport, or in more specific situations such as when a customer calls with a problem — and ask reps to post it in their work area. ■

