



# SkillSharpener Web Extra

## How to make a more positive impression on customers

**There's a lot that customer service reps can do to make a more positive impression on customers — and to keep them coming back again and again.**

Making a positive impression with customers begins the moment you pick up a call, click to chat, or smile across a desk.

Shep Hyken, author of *Amaze Every Customer, Every Time*, explains, "Customer service reps need to understand the importance of what that first impression does — how it sets up the interaction that is to follow. And they need to understand that the customer needs to feel like a person and not just an account."

So, how can you accomplish that? *Customer Communicator* put this question to Hyken and to a number of other service experts recently. Following is some of the valuable advice that they offered.

### Keep the focus on the customer

Chip Bell, author of *Sprinkles: Creating Awesome Experiences Through Innovative Service*, suggests that one important thing that customer service reps can do is "to pay attention to the personal things that matter most to customers."

He adds: "Customers today want personalized treatment, and that means being a perpetual customer sleuth on the little things that matter to them. Look for cues to start a personal dialog around the customer's interests, not just their needs and requirements."

Jeff Toister, author of *Service Failure*, suggests that reps look at the 2015 National Rage Study, conducted by Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, for a couple of issues that they should address when dealing with customers.

The first is that, according to the study, 93 percent of customers want to be treated with dignity. And according to Toister, this suggests that "reps should work hard to show respect for their customers. This includes taking time to understand the customer's issue rather than simply pushing toward a resolution."

And second, reps should address the 83 percent of customers who are looking for empathy by "trying

#### Best Behavior

### Act as if it's your first call of the day

One way that JoAnna Brandi suggests keeping your attitude positive through the course of a long day is to "act as if you were going on stage" with every customer call.

"Act as if you have the same amount of energy that you had when you started your shift at eight o'clock in the morning," she says. "Think of your work as kind of a performing art, and whenever you get on the phone with another customer, act as if it is the first call of your day."

Even if you don't have control over the calls you get, or the type of customer who might be on that next call, Brandi says, you do have control over the attitude that you bring to bear. "So, in a sense, it is a performing art, and it involves the skill of being able to talk to yourself in an encouraging way, to be able to say, 'I am a professional, I can do this!' Then the energy will come back, and your encounter with that customer will be much more positive," she says.



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to understand how their customers are feeling, and why," says Toister. "Try to make your customer feel that you are on their side and want to help them as best you can. You can't win if you solve a customer's issue but leave them feeling awful."

### Keep a positive attitude

JoAnna Brandi of JoAnna Brandi & Company suggests that one of the best things that reps can do to promote a positive experience for customers is to "nourish their own positivity. The more that we can do to be in a good mood — being in a positive place and radiating that positivity out — the easier it will be for the customer to recognize it and to take part."

So, sit up straight in your chair, take a deep breath when the phone rings, smile, and say to yourself, "This is the only customer I have right now, in this moment, and I am going to be 100 percent pleasant and positive with this person."

Brandi adds: "Just setting that intention to be attentive to and engage with the customer, and to be present for that customer, has a great effect — especially at the beginning and at the end of any interaction, because those are the parts that are going to be most clearly remembered."

### Keep the communication medium in mind

"When you communicate with a customer face to face, there is a lot of body language and other non-verbal cues that you can pick up to help keep the interaction positive," says Renée Evenson, author of *Customer Service Training 101*, but when you are handling a customer via phone, email, or text messaging, you have to be even more attentive.

First off, "answering promptly and greeting customers with enthusiasm and a helpful tone will help customers to form a favorable first impression, especially on the phone," Evenson says. "And when handling a contact via written communication, you can present yourself well by writing an enthusiastic opening statement and offering to help."

And whatever the medium, Evenson says, throughout the contact, you should:

- Maintain a professional and interested demeanor.
- Assure the customer that you can help.
- Keep an ongoing dialog (and explain why if you need to pause the contact).
- Ask appropriate questions.
- Listen well ... or read the customer's responses carefully.
- Respond appropriately.
- Find the best solution for each customer. After all, customers are not one-size-fits-all. Make your solution appropriate to the individual customer.

And when you sign off with a customer, says Shep Hyken, "Show appreciation, say thank you, and end strong." In fact, Hyken points to American Express customer service reps as a good example for signing off. Customers are usually asked after calling American Express to fill out a customer survey, "and the rep's job is to keep that customer on the phone until they feel that customer will rate them a nine or a 10 on the survey. So open the conversation in the right way, take care of the customer in a way the customer will notice, and end strong — because that last impression is the lasting impression." ■

