



This Month in Customer Service

## Get crafty to reduce holiday stress

Researchers have found that crafting and hobbies can relieve stress as much as meditation, deep breathing, and other relaxation techniques, says Nancy Monson, author of *Craft to Heal: Soothing Your Soul with Sewing, Painting, and Other Pastimes*.

And during the hectic holiday season relaxation and stress reduction are more important than ever.

Monson recommends familiar needle crafts for their many benefits. “Repetitive and rhythmic crafts such as knitting and sewing may even evoke what is known as the ‘relaxation response’ — a feeling of bodily and mental calm that is proven to enhance health and reduce the risk of heart disease, anxiety, and depression,” Monson says. “Crafts may also help stave off the effects of aging. Research shows that older people who engage in crafts and other creative activities grow new connections in the brain that keep it healthy.”

Needlecrafts require minimal set up and materials and can provide a nice opportunity to relax with team members. Anyone ready to form the Service Stitches? Or the Call Center Crafters? **ICC**

## For the best customer service, just say “YES”

**Make life easy for your customers and they are more likely to stay and buy again and again.**

Decades of research shows that what customers really want is an effortless customer service experience. They want fast access to a knowledgeable rep who will resolve their issue or concern quickly and efficiently and with a minimal amount of time and effort.

That’s the central message from Matthew Dixon, Nick Toman, and Rick Delisi, authors of the landmark book *The Effortless Experience*. But when they dug deeper into the research data, they discovered something even more interesting. They found that the customer’s perception of the amount of effort involved in an interaction is more important than the actual amount of effort involved. Or as the authors say, “How the customer feels about the interaction matters about twice as much as what they actually have to do during the interaction.”

That’s good news for reps. You may not be able to make sweeping structural changes to minimize the actual effort for customers (think complex call trees, multiple transfers, and the need to repeat information again and again), but you can improve the customer experience in a meaningful way by focusing on the “feel” side of the interaction.

## Don’t tell customers what you can’t do, tell them what you can do

In the midst of the typical service interaction, customers are constantly assessing how much effort is involved. The rep’s goal is to use the tools at their disposal to leave customers feeling that the interaction involved very little effort at all.

So how do you do it?

The authors say that the most powerful technique is to move from “no” to “yes.” After all the word “no” is a trigger that sets in motion an entire chain of negative emotions. No one wants to be told “no.” Instead, reps need to find a way to say “no” (because there are some things you just can’t do) but in a way that does not call up all of those negative emotions.

**Try your hand at the negative-positive switch**

Page 2

**Managing priorities during busy times**

Page 3

**Heading back to the office? Be a good neighbor**

Page 4

*The Effortless Experience* offers a good example of how to do this. It's an exercise from Walt Disney World called "What Time Does the Park Close?" Team members are asked to answer this simple question without using negative words. In their first attempts, say the authors, people struggle to come up with positive answers. For example they might say:

- "The park closes whenever the magic stops" or
- "The park closes whenever you leave."

While both of these options are positive, neither is actually correct. "Ultimately," the authors say, "the most correct answer is some version of, 'The park remains open right up until 8 p.m. Then we reopen for even more fun tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.'"

In this example, the rep avoids the negative word "closes" and replaces it with the more positive "remains open." It's a subtle shift that the authors say will turn a "no" situation into a "yes" situation.

### Good for customers, good for the company, good for you

There's one more benefit to using positive language. Day in and day out, most customer calls go smoothly. But in those rare instances where customers become angry, hostile, or confrontational using positive language can make the calls easier and more manageable, say the authors. **TCC**

#### Exercise

### Try your hand at the negative-positive switch

One company that embraces the concept of effortless experiences in its call center is Osram Sylvania, the lighting manufacturer. To focus on positive language, the company identified the 10 service issues that came up the most frequently and developed positive language options. These are presented in a simple chart that every rep has pinned up in front of them.

Here are the top three service issues with negative and positive language responses:

	Negative language	Positive language
Backordered product	"We don't have that item in stock."	"We will have stock availability on ..."
Order placement	"We can't ship the order until ..."	"We can ship your order on ..."
Pricing dispute	"You have to talk to sales for pricing issues."	"Our sales department may be able to help you with this issue."

In the spaces below, list your personal top three service issues along with a negative language response and a positive language response.

	Negative language	Positive language

### Pop Quiz

Test your knowledge of customer service with this month's pop quiz. Answer each statement true or false. Turn to page 4 to check your answers.

		True	False
1.	Sometimes interactions that don't require a lot of effort feel like a lot of effort to customers.		
2.	Reps should never say no to customers.		
3.	Companies that are easy to do business with always have the best and most current technology.		

## A monthly roundup ...

### Hacker takes advantage of customer support

Robinhood Markets Inc., a financial services company, recently announced that a hacker stole the personal information of about 7 million users. A company statement said the breach hinged on a phone call where the hacker duped a customer support staffer. It didn't provide details on how exactly the culprit gained entry.

*Robinhood.com*

### Reps are in demand

The IRS plans to hire more than 3,000 additional customer service representatives as it prepares for next year's filing season. The IRS struggled to respond to an unprecedented number of calls from taxpayers last season — in large part due to confusion and questions about COVID-19 relief programs.

*irs.gov*

### Keep a positive attitude

Author Jon Gordon notes on his website that, "as people develop more positive emotions, they become more resilient under stress; they develop a broader perspective that allows them to see the big picture and identify solutions; and they build more meaningful relationships and connections." So keep up that positive attitude.

*jongordon.com*

## Ask the Panel

# Managing priorities during busy times

*December and early January are our busiest times of the year. It's also the time when a lot of people are off for the holidays. How can I turn this busy and stressful time into the joyful season it should be?*

### Make your own job aids

Management typically does everything it can to help balance the workload, but there are things you can do, too. Try creating your own FAQ cheat sheets. You probably have quite a few customers calling in to ask for the same information or because they have the same problem. Try to note the most common inquiries and issues down as you go, along with the answers and solutions. By doing this, you won't waste time finding the same information or instructions over and over again. Your calls and emails will be shorter and quicker, so you'll have time to accomplish more with less stress.

— Kristina Valjeravic

### Get organized

Even when you have good departmental tools in place, you may need to create a personal system that helps you manage the workload. One thing that I find useful is color coding. Basically you assign a color to major areas of work. Then you color code your paper files and your digital systems like email and your calendar to match. In the end it helps me save time looking for things. And since I'm working from home, finding things can be hard any time of year.

— Julie Peters

### Stop multi-tasking

In the past, the general wisdom was that people should multi-task to get more done in less time. That's

changed and I think it's a change for the good. I find that I can do better work and actually get more done when I am focused on a single task without interruption. If your work situation allows it, try time blocking. You block off time on your calendar to dedicate to a single, important task. So you might batch similar tasks together and do them during specific blocks of time. For my work, I find that blocking out three times each day to respond to email works really well.

— Veronica Kriegmen

### Take your breaks

No matter how busy you are, take your breaks. You may want to get everything done and help every customer, but if you're burnt out you can't help anyone. I encourage everyone to make the most of every break by getting up, taking a quick walk, and doing some deep stretching. You will come back to your desk refreshed and the volume of work will actually seem more manageable. One company that I worked for offered a modified schedule during our busiest times. We could reduce lunch from an hour to a half hour and add extra 10 minute breaks. It really helped us manage the stress of busy times.

— Isaac Kremmer



**Ask the panel.** Have a question or comment you'd like to share with the panel? Just email [info@CustomerServiceGroup.com](mailto:info@CustomerServiceGroup.com). Please use the subject "Ask the Panel."

# Refreshers and quick tips ...

## Heading back to the office? Be a good neighbor

Service teams often work in very close quarters. If that's your situation, then you've probably learned that it takes very little to get on someone else's nerves. To ensure that you're a good neighbor, pay attention to the following rules of "cubicle courtesy" from Robert Half, a human resources consulting firm.

- **Be a courteous guest.** Never barge into someone else's work area uninvited. Use your "inside voice" to make sure that you don't become part of another rep's conversation with a customer or distract neighbors from their work.

- **Limit casual conversation.** Try to avoid socializing where it might interfere with someone else's work.

- **Don't be a borrower.** Or at the very least, ask first before borrowing supplies from someone else's workspace.

- **Remember decorum.** While it's one thing to individualize your workspace, it's another thing to create an office distraction. Make sure photos, posters, or other decorations can't be construed as offensive in any way.

## Three habits of bad listeners

"Hearing without listening happens all the time in business relationships," says Joe Takash, author of *Results Through Relationships*. "And we've all been guilty of this in one way or another. Maybe we're preoccupied and not really paying attention to what the other person is saying. Maybe we're busy preparing what we are going to say in response. Maybe we're anxious about some-

thing else and just pretending to listen."

But just because it happens doesn't mean we have to make a habit of it. One way to improve your listening skills, he says, is to make sure you don't fall into the following bad habits:

**The interrupter.** Interrupting others when they are speaking sends a negative message, says Takash. It's as if you were telling the customer: "I am not really interested in paying attention to what you have to say. Obviously, what I have to say is more important."

**The sentence finisher.** When you finish other people's sentences, Takash says, what they hear is: "I know how to complete your thoughts better than you do." He adds: "Even if you can accurately anticipate what others have to say, they will not appreciate being spoken over or cut off in mid-sentence."

**The friendly faker.** This happens when you are distracted or preoccupied and attempt to fake attention, even if you didn't absorb anything. You nod your head or say "yes, yes," to suggest that you're listening. "Keep in mind that other people can sense if you are not listening, so don't fake it," Takash says. "Force yourself to be honest and admit that you didn't catch everything that was said."

## Watch your words in email and chat

With more companies handling customer issues and complaints via email and web chat, it's more important than ever to watch what you say.

When responding to a customer complaint, try to wait a bit before sending your reply. Why? If reading

the customer's email annoyed you or put you on the defensive, you may have inadvertently expressed your emotions in your message. Take a brief moment to cool down. Then reread your message to ensure it conveys a customer-friendly tone. **TCC**

## Pop Quiz Solution

1. **True.** How the customer feels about the interaction matters about twice as much as what they actually have to do during the interaction.
2. **False.** Reps should be truthful but in a way that doesn't trigger a negative emotional reaction in the customer.
3. **False.** Every organization can reduce perceived effort and increase customer satisfaction by focusing on how the rep makes the customer feel during the service interaction.

ISSN 0145-8450

### Customer Communicator

A publication of the Customer Service Group  
36 Midvale Road, Suite 2E  
Mountain Lakes, NJ 07046  
Phone: (973) 265-2300 • Fax: (973) 402-6056  
Email: [info@CustomerServiceGroup.com](mailto:info@CustomerServiceGroup.com)  
Website: [CustomerServiceGroup.com](http://CustomerServiceGroup.com)

#### Editor

William Keenan Jr. — ext. 116  
[bkeenan@CustomerServiceGroup.com](mailto:bkeenan@CustomerServiceGroup.com)

#### Customer Service

Mary Pagliaroli — ext. 101  
[mpagliaroli@CustomerServiceGroup.com](mailto:mpagliaroli@CustomerServiceGroup.com)

#### Reprints and Permissions

Michael DeWitt — ext. 107  
[mjdewitt@CustomerServiceGroup.com](mailto:mjdewitt@CustomerServiceGroup.com)

#### Publisher

Margaret DeWitt — ext. 106  
[msdewitt@CustomerServiceGroup.com](mailto:msdewitt@CustomerServiceGroup.com)

*Customer Communicator®* is published monthly by the Customer Service Group, which provides management and training materials for customer service executives, managers and representatives through its newsletters, books, support materials, and website.



**Alexander Communications Group**

© 2021 Alexander Communications Group, Inc.  
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Alexander Communications Group.





# SkillSharpeners

The manager's companion to *Customer Communicator*

December 2021

## December's highlights

In this month's issue of *Customer Communicator*, your team will find:

1. An interesting article on the benefits of positive language. We look past the standard advice and delve into the social science research that proves language matters.
2. Practical advice and tips from the frontline on how to manage holiday workloads and related stress.
3. Customer service news, plus tips for being a good office neighbor, improving listening, keeping a friendly tone, and more.

### Manager's Notes

This month's lead article, "For the best customer service, just say 'YES'" includes an exercise that reps may complete on their own. The goal of this exercise is to identify a common negative situation such as a back ordered product, and to develop both negative and positive language for responding to the customer.

This exercise can also be used with a small group of reps working together.

To begin, review the benefits of positive language in shaping how customers feel about a service interaction. The research shows that customers want an "effortless" interaction. While some interactions require a good deal of effort on the part of the customer, the rep can reduce the perception of effort through the use of positive language.

Next, present the 10 most common problems in your service center. For each problem ask one team member to offer a "negative" language response. Then open the floor to suggestions for "positive" language responses. If you have a white board or the ability to share your screen online, list each of the positive language options for all to see. Then discuss the options and vote for the preferred language.

After the meeting, distribute a copy of the "cheat sheet" you've just created to all team members.

# Keep your team connected, motivated, and learning

The *Customer Communicator* three-part service includes:

**Customer Communicator.** How-to articles, practical tips, and tested techniques engage frontline teams in ongoing service skills training and reinforcement. *Delivered monthly, for distribution to your team.*

**SkillSharpener.** This simple, yet powerful tool will help you generate discussion about the current issue of *Customer Communicator*. It will reinforce key learning, surface gaps in understanding, and allow team members to share their experiences. *Delivered monthly.*

**Thank You Kit.** Everything you need to recognize, reward, and motivate with thank you cards and certificates. Printed on high quality papers and sent directly to you for distribution. Sold separately for \$79.95, it is free with your new subscription.



**Subscribe today and start this valuable resource working for your team.**

**YES, sign me up for a one year subscription.**

I have  reps x \$24 = \$  (Minimum order 10 copies per month.)

☐ **Charge my credit card**

☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ AmEx ☐ Discover

Card Number

Exp. Date

Security Code

☐ **Purchase order**

Fax to 1-973-402-6056.

☐ **Check enclosed**

Payable to Customer Service Group.

☐ **Bill me**

**Mail:** Customer Service Group  
36 Midvale Road, Suite 2E  
Mountain Lakes, NJ 07046  
**Fax:** (973) 402-6056  
**Email:** info@CustomerServiceGroup.com  
**Website:** CustomerServiceGroup.com

Name

Title

Firm/organization

Address

City

State

Zip

Country

Phone

Email

**No-risk, money-back guarantee:**

You may cancel your subscription at any time for a full, 100% refund.

**For fastest service call 1-973-265-2300**

QTGA