



THE TAKEAWAY

Getting a better night's sleep

In today's fast paced world, many people sacrifice sleep to meet the demands of the day. But sleep expert Dr. Neil Stanley warns against skipping sleep and offers these tips for a better night's rest.



Wind-down. Set aside around half an hour before your bedtime for some activities you find personally relaxing. This could be taking a warm bath, reading a book or listening to your favorite music. This helps your body and mind prepare for sleep and gives you a better chance of getting to sleep easily. This is also the time to turn off all electronic devices.



Make your bedroom a sleep sanctuary. Your bedroom should be cool, dark, and quiet. Ideally, you should aim for the temperature to be around 60 to 68 degrees. Use blackout shades or a sleep mask to block unwanted light. And reduce noise with a fan or white noise machine.

Are you reading or reading between the lines?

Reading between the lines takes communication to the next level. It improves service while reducing delays and frustration.

Have you ever found yourself stuck in a volley of emails? You ask a question. The answer is incomplete. And the emails go back and forth. It can be frustrating and time consuming.

The goal for service email is to avoid that back and forth, and to provide full and complete replies so that the first reply is the final reply.

To do this, you need strong product knowledge, good writing skills, and a firm grasp of analytical reading. Leslie O'Flahaven, author of *Clear, Correct, Concise Email*, defines analytical reading as reading beyond what the customer is saying to understand and respond to what the customer is asking. In other words, reading between the lines. Here's how to do it.

In the email below, Susan writes to ABC Waste Disposal. She says:

I have a small broken bookcase that I need picked up. Also, is there any way that we could get the larger recycling container? I have one of the small open boxes, but we fill it up too fast.

You'll see that Susan asks just one question, about her recycling container. But an analytical reading of the email, looking not only at what Susan is saying, but what she is asking, reveals five questions. These are:

- Will you pick up my broken bookcase?
- If so, is there an additional charge?
- How do I arrange the pickup?
- Can I have a larger recycling container?
- If so, do I need to do anything special to request it?

Clearly, analytical reading would lead to Susan receiving the most complete response and allow her to act on the information.



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Are you guilty of these bad service habits?

At one time or another everyone has made one of these errors. It's unavoidable. The goal is to keep errors from becoming habits.

Do you ever find yourself doing too many things at once, even when you have a customer on the phone?

Or do you find yourself responding to an emotional "trigger" that sets you off and gets in the way of serving the customer?

Or do you tend to see customer issues from your own or your company's perspective, without looking at them through the customer's eyes?

If so, then you have fallen victim to what Jeff Toister, a customer service consultant and author of *Service Failure*, identifies as one of the big three bad habits or attitudes that he sees affecting customer service reps.

"They are all interrelated, and they are a real challenge to customer service reps," he says, "not only because they hurt service levels, but because they are partially driven by instinctive behaviors — and that means they are a lot more difficult to spot and control."

Habit No. 1. Distraction

The first of the three bad habits is distraction. The solution is twofold, Toister says. The first step is to minimize potential distractions as much as possible.

But, you can't eliminate all distractions, so the next step is awareness. If you know the things that are pulling your attention away from the customer, you can double-down on your focus, and consciously try to tune those things out.

Habit No. 2. Triggers

The second bad habit is falling victim to your emotional "triggers" — those things that customers say and do that trigger strong emotional reactions.

The first step in managing these situations is recognizing your triggers. It may be the customer's tone, the words they are using, or a nonverbal cue. The second step is to pause and breathe deeply for just a few seconds before

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All big things come from small beginnings. The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision.

— James Clear, Writer and Speaker

”

you allow those emotional reactions to kick in.

Habit No. 3. Me, me, me

And the third bad habit is a "me focus" — where, Toister says, our natural inclination is to see things from our own perspective, and not the customer's. A "me focus" might include a focus on internal metrics, convenience, and company policy. A "customer focus" shifts to the customer's actual needs, and emotions.

Most, if not all, reps are going to deal with one or more of these errors at some point. Being alert is the first step in keeping them from becoming habits.



POP QUIZ

Test your knowledge of customer service in this month's POP QUIZ.

1

To manage your time, limit email responses to exactly what the customer is asking.

✓ TRUE

✗ FALSE

2

The first step to changing instinctive behaviors is awareness.

✓ TRUE

✗ FALSE

3

Taking time to wind-down can improve sleep quality.

✓ TRUE

✗ FALSE



Understanding the role of customer service rep

"I've been working in a call center for several years. It was a fast paced, high-volume environment. Now, I've transitioned to a customer service center. It's very different, the scripts are gone and customer satisfaction scores are more important than speed. Can you offer any advice?"



Focus on listening

"This sounds like a real change for you," says Customer Service Manager Patricia Hanson. "You're basically moving from an environment that views customer interactions as individual transactions to an environment that views each interaction as an opportunity to build and strengthen the relationship with the customer."

"This approach focuses on meeting the customer's stated needs as well as their unstated and emotional needs. In many ways it's a more difficult task, but I think you'll find it more rewarding."

"A good first step in this transition is to focus on listening skills. In customer service, you're listening for much more than just the facts, you're listening for tone of voice, does the customer sound calm or agitated? Does

the customer sound relaxed or rushed? Does the customer sound unsure or confident? The customer's attitude will guide you in how you present yourself and handle the call."



Embrace questioning

"I think that the way we handle questions in the customer service center is very different," says service consultant Trevor Spunt. "In a call center, you likely ended the call by saying something like, 'Is there anything else I can help you with today?'"

"In the service center, you will be paraphrasing and questioning throughout the call to ensure understanding and agreement," he says.

"For example, after you have resolved one or two items for the customer, say something like, 'Before we move on, I want to be sure I have addressed your concerns so far?'"

"And when you do reach the end of the call," Spunt says, "then you can say, 'I hope I have addressed all of your concerns — but if there is anything else I can do, please let me know.'"

Spunt adds that the sincerity with which that message comes across — and the experience that the rep has provided throughout the call — will affect the customer's willingness to share other issues or needs.



Build rapport

Service Advisor Shauna Belt notes that "one of the things that you're going to find very different is that you will be building rapport, or a trusting relationship, with your customers. If you are honest with your customers and show a sincere interest in them you will go a long way to developing a trusting relationship."



ASK THE EXPERTS

Have a question or comment you'd like to share? Just email info@CustomerServiceGroup.com. Please use the subject "Ask the Experts."



"Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens."

— Jimi Hendrix



REFRESHERS & QUICK TIPS



What will your service inspire?

A German tourist named Marcel Thiel met community service representative Moses Pierce in downtown Philadelphia. Thiel asked for advice on where he could find some good barbeque in the area. Pierce recommended a local market and took the time to walk Thiel there.

Thiel was researching barbequed foods for a restaurant he was opening. When the shop launched, Thiel named one of his sandwiches the "Philly Moses" in recognition of the outstanding service he had received.



In a slump? Adopt a plant

Researchers interviewed over 400 Amazon employees. They found that those whose office environment included natural elements, like indoor plants felt greater job satisfaction than those who didn't work around natural elements. Researchers said the natural elements helped to buffer the effects of job stress and anxiety.



The value of service

Studies show that 95 percent of customers whose complaints are resolved quickly will buy from that company again. But only 46 percent of customers whose complaints are not resolved quickly will buy again.



Don't let experience get in the way

Our brains naturally create or identify familiar patterns. So the more experienced you are, and the more you've seen the same pattern over and over again, the more likely it is for your brain to switch off the listening part and jump to conclusions. That's fine if your assumptions are right, but if you are wrong, you stop listening and miss out on important details.



POP QUIZ ANSWERS

1 ✕ FALSE

Responding to exactly what a customer asks and failing to find the hidden and follow-up questions can lead to a time-consuming round of questions and answers.

2 ✓ TRUE

Instinctive behaviors are among the most difficult to change. But change can happen with awareness and effort.

3 ✓ TRUE

Making time to wind-down, relax, and disconnect from the cares of the day can significantly improve sleep quality.

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WHAT'S INSIDE?

Highlights for October



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

1. A reminder to practice analytical reading.
2. Three bad habits to avoid.
3. An "Ask the Experts" column with advice on what really matters when working in customer service.
4. The pop quiz, quick refreshers, monthly quotes, and more.



Notes and activities:

As a writing coach and trainer, Leslie O'Flahaven has seen virtually every mistake a frontline rep can make. Whether it's in traditional postal mail, email, or chat. This month in *Customer Communicator*, she explains how to move past surface reading to the more impactful analytical reading.

Managers can reinforce her message with a group training activity, which involves practice and discussion. First, you'll need to pull a typical customer email or write your own.

Practice: Distribute the sample email. Explain what analytical reading is. Ask everyone to review the email and list all of the questions the customer is asking, both explicitly and implicitly. Invite several people to read their lists aloud.

Write all of the questions on a white board. Some reps may have missed some of the implicit questions. Others may find more than you intended.

Discussion questions: How will analytical reading benefit our department? (Examples include reduced time replying to email, reduced frustration for the customer, and reduced frustration for the rep.)

If an email contains one question mark, how many questions does it contain? (This question gets to the heart of analytical reading and is sure to spark some aha moments.)