

EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

Robert Lemon



Robert Lemon CUSTOMER SERVICE A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Where does customer service begin? In my opinion, GREAT Customer Service starts with a great vision, a great purpose and a desire to serve.

MY DEFINITION:

Customer service is the process of making an exchange that causes the customer to know that value has been placed on pleasing him, and giving more than he expected of the exchange.

Afterwards, there has to be an evaluation. Does the customer feel we lived up to our stated goals? If not, we need to reconsider how we do what we do and make adjustments to match the result to the vision.

A FEW OTHER DEFINITIONS:

"Customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase."- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer_service

"Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction - that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer expectation." Turban, E., Lee J., King D., & Chung, H. (2002). *Electronic commerce: A managerial perspective* (International ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall International.

"Customer service is the ability to provide a service or product in the way that it has been promised."

"Customer service is about treating others as you would like to be treated yourself"
-[www.admin.state.nh.us/hr/documents/Workforce_Development/...](http://www.admin.state.nh.us/hr/documents/Workforce_Development/)

WHAT DEFINITIONS ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS USING?

If you've publicized your definition, then they will use yours (and hold you accountable). If not, they are using their own, which may not be 'reasonable' for you. So, manage their expectation by giving them your definition, and keep your promises!

IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER SERVICE?

If we know their definitions we can meet their expectations.

If we **meet** their expectations, they will probably return.

If we **exceed** their expectations, they will **definitely** return, with others, most likely.

Do you 'price shop' for gasoline? Sure you do, and you'll go out of the way without really thinking about it too much. That decision is price based, and will change when the price changes.

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However, if you like good service, and a business provides you with good service, then you will continue to patronize that business, for the service, not just the price. What about you, how much of your business is from repeat customers?

Remember, repeat business is huge business!

SIDE NOTE #1: HOW DO YOU DELIVER YOUR PRODUCT? WILL THE PLATFORM CHANGE?

WordPerfect had a virtual monopoly on word processing in big firms that used DOS. When Windows arrived, the WordPerfect team didn't feel the need to investigate this new way of doing word processing, because they were so dominant, and in less than a year, they were toast.

SOME PLATFORMS HAVE ALREADY CHANGED:

- CDs to iTunes
- TV to cable
- Post office to email (2008 email sent in 24 hrs. was equal to 1 year of USPS)
- Blockbuster to Netflix, or Hulu, and others
- Watches or alarm clocks to mobile phones
- Landlines to mobile phones

OTHER PLATFORMS ARE CHANGING AS WE SPEAK:

- Movie theatre to on demand at home
- Watching entire newscasts to choosing your news

ARE THERE PLATFORM CHANGES IN YOUR INDUSTRY, AND DO YOU HAVE A PLAN?

- Internet, podcasts, streaming, social media...

AND FOR CHURCHES SPECIFICALLY, WHAT DECISIONS HAVE YOU MADE ON THE FOLLOWING?

- Small groups, Saturday services, Different service times? Shorter services?

SIDE NOTE #2 CUSTOMER NEEDS CHANGE, ARE YOU KEEPING UP?

Do you have *typical* practices or excellent practices in place?

A **typical** practice forces the customer to conform to -your style (not accepting credit or debit cards).

An **excellent** practice takes changing forces into account and adjusts where possible. (Credit or debit cards can be used at the drive thru, or to pay the IRS)

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Example: Children are now much more interactive, are you meeting their need? Same with young adults, attention span is trained to be rewarded with new updated info in short bursts, not long speeches. Are you prepared to deliver information or your product or your service in a way that works for them? Or are you going to force them to sit down and be still?

When was the last time you personally bought a set of encyclopedias? You have a different way of accessing your info now, so you are no longer their customer...

If you don't provide your potential customers access, **you** are eliminating them!

PREPARING FOR THE LONG HAUL:

What is your horizon for your company's future? Or, to put it another way, what is the extent of your vision for your company? Your company can outlive you, but only if you plan for it to!

Jim Collins- Author of 'Good to Great' has recorded a few things that help build companies to last (see web link on 'resource' page).

Your plan to extend the longevity of your company must include two key components, your **core values** and your **people**.

WHO ARE YOU?

What are your core values, your guiding purposes, what you stand for?

This is the heart of your business. Businesses that are service oriented tend to have better customer retention and make more\$ than non-service oriented.

Stihl Tools doesn't sell in big box stores, they want their customers to be well served, and their sales people are trained to also provide service.

Lexus Customer service is legendary including a **free Lexus loaner**.

Fog Creek software - has a refund policy for the trial version of their software.

For these three companies, customer service is not their main product, but it causes folks to buy what they are selling...

WHO ARE YOU? (ARE YOU SURE?)

- Urban vs. rural
- Hi -tech vs. Hi touch
- Progressive vs. Old school
- Hi-end vs. Broad or mass appeal

What can you do better than anyone in the world? (Hint: you can be yourself!)

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Be Authentic. Stay in your lane. Offer what your customer needs/wants. **Don't try to serve a customer that you don't qualify for, you'll only disappoint them.**

You will attract those interested in what you offer, not what **you** think **they** think you offer. For example, ever go to McDonalds to have coffee and dessert and enjoy the ambiance of the McCafe? They are **not** attracting the 'coffee shop' customers! Ever hear of the 'Arch Deluxe'? (Google it, you'd think McD's would've learned).

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

- What do you provide?
- What problem do you solve?
- What is unique about your product or the way your product is presented, packaged, etc.

If you know who you are and what you stand for, you will have an easier time making decisions and adjustments. Don't try to be all things to all people!

SO, WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

There are at least 2 types, but first... Who is your ideal customer? (This is who you aspire to serve)

What will attract them? Can you provide the attraction?

What about your **existing** customers?

What are their needs?

Where do you find them?

TYPE 1 CUSTOMERS - EXTERNAL: these are your existing customers

- What needs are you fulfilling?
- What needs are you not fulfilling?

Ask your best customers, 'how could we do this better?' Or 'tell me what we are missing?' they'll happily tell you!

WARNING! THE FOLLOWING (ITALICIZED) IS MY OWN PERSONAL CONSIDERATION

(Just a thought...If a customer is requesting a product or service that doesn't fit what you do or who you are, and you have been unsuccessful in resetting their expectations, how long do you continue to use resources to attempt to satisfy them? Perhaps a better idea is to redirect them to a place that might better suit their unanswered need. Of course, the utmost care and consideration must be given to making them feel good about their options, and not alienating them, or mistreating them in any way)

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TYPE 2 CUSTOMERS - INTERNAL: Staff, volunteers, employees, team, etc.

They help you serve the external customers, and must buy into what you stand for in order to do so authentically (*They must drink **your** Kool Aid!*). So, take care of your people, make them know you care. If your people don't feel you care about them, it will be difficult for them to make your customers feel you care about them.

Andrew Carnegie reportedly said "Take away my people but leave my factories and soon grass will grow on the factory floors.....Take away my factories, but leave my people and soon we will have a new and better factory" This is the attitude that helped him to become one of the world's richest men in his time, something he attributed to his **people**. How valuable are your people? Do you tell them?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Do you partake of the same experiences that your customers or staff have? In the technology world, this is called 'dogfooding' and it can make you aware of things that might need changing. (Google 'dogfooding' for more info)

Here at _____ we have asked our people to say 'my pleasure to serve you whenever delivering a service. We want them to be continually reminded that we are a service based organization, and we take pleasure in accomplishing any needed or requested services.

THOUGHTS ON IMPROVING

- Publish a clear vision of what you do, how you do it
- Train your team; help them buy into the vision. Remember, *Happy team = happy clients*
- State the promises that you intend to keep in terms of serving your clients, and keep them.
- Measure your performance and solicit feedback, ask 'How are we doing?' Or 'How did we do?'
- Learn to say, "I'm sorry, that's not what we wanted to happen! I can fix that, would you allow me?" If you can salvage persons who are initially disappointed, a survey showed that 80 percent of them will become strong fans of your product or service
- Keep your core values intact, but look to stimulate and progress, try new things!

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SELECTED RESOURCES:

Jim Collins, bestselling author, on preparing your company for the long haul
http://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/building-companies.html

Joel Spolsky, of Fog Creek Software, on customer service
<http://www.joelonsoftware.com/articles/customerservice.html>

Seth Godin, bestselling author- 'The Customer is always right'
http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2006/04/the_customer_is.html

Gladin, Susan. "How Customer Service Works" HowStuffWorks.com
<http://money.howstuffworks.com/customer-service.htm>