

CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH PASSION AND PRINCIPLES

In 1979, long before customer service came into vogue, I designed the world's first customer service training program. I felt that if organizations would make their customers feel special, wanted, and appreciated, they would earn their loyalty. The way to do that was by giving front-line employees the tools they needed to deliver great service and create impressions that would form an organization's reputation.

I have a concise and practical list of six essential customer service principles for awesome service. These "Personal Steps of Excellence" should be framed on your office wall and those of your general managers.

1. Feel Good About Yourself – Employees do not go to work dreaming about how they can work exceptionally hard to make the company and the owner more money. Be realistic. Many employees have personal problems. The more we can uplift their self-worth and self-image, the more they'll become productive and feel like they're in a win-win relationship. In return, they will deliver a higher level of excellence. Each of us has the responsibility to look after our own feelings and give ourselves recognition for good work. We need to commit ourselves to goals that are worthy of our abilities.

When you know you are doing your best for most customers and working associates, you will feel good. Concentrate on your strengths. Recognize the importance of your role. You can make the difference.

2. Practice Habits of Courtesy – It only takes a few seconds for a customer to know if you care. Frankly, it doesn't take additional time to be nice. Too many firms believe this isn't an important part of customer service.

Everyone has a right to expect courtesy from you. To be so self-centered or preoccupied with your work that you forget to show courtesy to each customer is to signal that you don't care. On-the-job practices of courtesy are an important part of everyone's role to signal respect. The more you give, the more you care.

3. Give Positive Spoken Feedback – Communicate verbally and non-verbally with positive intent. A genuine smile and calling customers by their name is part of effective communication, whether in person or on the phone.

It costs you almost nothing, only a little effort, but the rewards are great. Every human contact is an opportunity to give the gift of good feelings through the words you say. People can't read your mind; so

what you say is your best evidence that you care.

4. Perform for the Customer – Do what you said you were going to do. If you promise to call someone on Tuesday, call them on Tuesday. Keep your promises. Too many employees lie or make excuses when there's a problem.

Customers have the right to demand performance. They aren't interested in our problems and excuses. We constantly need to ask ourselves, "Is our performance creating satisfied customers?" "Don't promise what you can't deliver – deliver what you promise" is a good guideline.

5. Listen Carefully – This is so rare. Often when an employee asks a customer's name, the customer will have to repeat it several times, as so many employees have poor listening skills. Some are told to ask questions, but often fail to listen closely to the customer's answer.

Jobs can become routine. When you see hundreds of customers, you can become desensitized to the individual. You have to concentrate on each person. Get in tune with their situation, their attitudes, and needs. Anticipate, read between the lines, ask questions, and get involved to show that you care and that you want to satisfy the customer. Complaints can be a positive resource if you listen closely and act to resolve the issues.

6. Learn and Grow in Your Job – Know everything about your products and services. Too often, employees have no concept or understanding of their products and services. You can tell in a few seconds if the employee really knows what they are talking about.

Grow where you're planted. Every job offers an opportunity for greatness. In a sense, every day you're mentally either growing or mentally. Learn about your company, learn about your products, and learn about your customers. With learning comes self-fulfillment.

Don't wait for someone to give it to you, go after it. **RO**

John Tschohl—described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru and service strategist—is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute, which has developed more than 26 customer service training programs. John has authored several books on customer service, including Moving Up, and has just released the 10th edition of Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service. John@servicequality.com or www.customer-service.com.

