

GET AN EDGE WITH CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING

As a business owner, you can sell the same items or the same services at the same prices as your competitors. In that kind of “six of one, a half dozen of the other” situation, what can you offer that will give your business a competitive advantage?

The answer is: Exceptional Customer Service. Not only will it increase your customer base and your revenues, it will save you money in the long term by reducing employee turnover. Given today's economic climate, it's critical to do everything you can to increase your odds of being (and staying) successful.

Yet few companies are eager to invest the time and money to train their employees to provide world-class customer service. Most owners think it simply isn't important, much less necessary, because their employees will instinctively know how to provide great service.

The truth is, they won't. Just as athletes must train constantly to be winners, employees must train often in the fundamentals of providing outstanding service. Schools and colleges don't offer customer service courses, so how will your employees get the training they need? You must provide it.

Ninety-nine percent of your company's contact with customers happens through your frontline employees. The sad fact is, those employees are the least-paid, least-trained, least-valued and least-appreciated people you employ. They deserve better! When they aren't trained to provide exceptional customer service, many employees become frustrated and burned-out and leave.

Customer service training isn't an expense – it's a high-yield investment. It's a profit-producing strategy. If you want to instill a service culture in your company, you must make a total commitment to do so, starting at the top and flowing down through management to your frontline employees.

When you train your employees well, the return on investment is surprising. You'll realize increased sales, improved employee

morale and productivity, fewer customer complaints, a drop in employee turnover, and an increase in customer loyalty.

You might be thinking that your employees are already providing great customer service, but you may just be turning a blind eye to what's really going on. For example, when a customer asks an employee where they can find a certain product, does the employee simply point, or do they walk the customer to the product? Do your employees call customers by name? Do they thank them for their business? Are they proactive in asking customers if they can be of help? Do they smile? Do they make eye contact? Are they empowered and trained to resolve issues on the spot, instead of having to consult a superior?

These are just a few elements of exceptional customer service – and they must be taught and refreshed constantly. You can't train your employees once a year and expect them to perform to the highest standards. If you want to drive a customer service culture, you should train the employees every four months, offering them something new and fresh each time. The training should focus on quality, accuracy, dependability, speed, human relationships and great customer-service attitudes.

When you give your employees the tools and skills they need to take care of your customers, they (and your customers) will stay with you.

For more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, visit www.customer-service.com.

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John Tschohl is a professional speaker, trainer, and consultant. He is the president and founder of Service Quality Institute – the global leader in customer service – with operations in over 40 countries. John speaks more than 50 times each year and is considered one of the foremost authorities on service strategy, success, empowerment and customer service. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. Contact John on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

