

Creating Favorable Impressions

Steven R. Van Hook, PhD

The Importance of Favorable Customer Service

Studies show there are a number of reasons a business may lose customers. Some move away, some go to the competition, some are simply dissatisfied. But the largest majority—close to 70 percent of customers who leave a company for good—say the primary reason was because of bad service from just one employee!

Keeping repeat customers is just good business: it can cost 5 times as much to attract a new customer as it costs to keep an old one. Great customer service from every member on a company's team is essential to keep customers.

Enhancing Customer Impressions and Satisfaction

There are certain practices that create the most favorable impressions with customers, and help ensure their needs have been met. The foremost of these is to give your customer your full attention, and handle their questions or complaints effectively.

Let your customers feel at that moment, there is nothing more important to you than helping to achieve their satisfaction. You may have a line of other customers needing assistance at your help-desk, or a number of callers waiting in the queue. Still, you can only serve one customer at a time, and the customer you are serving *now* should feel that your full attention is focused on that.

Furthermore, you should get to know your customer as well as you can within the constraints of the moment. Know the customer's name and use it, using Mr. or Ms. and their last name, or their first name if appropriate. Know their home city, their immediate need, and certainly why they're turning to you for help. Give them special and personalized attention, and they'll most likely appreciate you for it.

While you should always aim to adequately meet customer expectations, it helps to do the unexpected as well. Give them a follow-up call or email to make sure their problem has been resolved. Send them a coupon for an upcoming sale item. Or throw in an extra item for free.

Two other important customer service tactics are to 1) talk about benefits, not features. Customers don't need to know all the technical aspects of a product, but how is it going to improve their lives. And 2) know your competition; not to criticize them, but to better understand some of the options your customer may be considering. There may even be a time when you will recommend a competitor's service or product if it better meets your customer's needs. If they feel you are putting their best interests above your own, you will certainly win your customers' appreciation for that!

All of these steps lead to three phrases that help ensure the highest level of customer service: *listen*, *empathize*, and *take charge*. To listen best, give your full attention to your customer and be sure to hear all the issues that may need to be addressed. Empathize (rather than just sympathize) to assure the customers you understand and want to help. One customer service student suggested a way to discern between sympathy and empathy: *sympathy* is when you say “I feel bad *for* you”; *empathy* is when you say “I feel bad *with* you.”

Finally, you take charge of the problem, so your customers feel they have a champion on their side. It is no longer just the *customer’s* problem, but *our* problem that you have a vested interest in resolving.

So, to recap the steps towards favorable customer impressions and satisfaction:

- Give your customers your full attention, dealing with one customer at a time
- Handle their complaints efficiently and effectively
- Know your customer
- Give them special treatment
- Do the unexpected
- Talk about benefits, not features
- Know your competition
- Listen, empathize, take charge

Affecting Customer Loyalty

As mentioned earlier, it costs much less to keep satisfied customers returning to your business, than it costs to get them there in the first place. By assuring favorable impressions and customer satisfaction, you win their loyalty.

Customers are judging a company by the person they are interacting with—at this point all the money spent on marketing, product development, management, comes down to how happy the customers are with the service they receive. The attitude of the customer service worker is what counts more than anything else; even it's only a smile, friendly eye contact, and a few supportive words.

The best customer service workers look for opportunities to help. They've made it a mission in life to make a positive difference in the world about them, one customer at a time. They are on the lookout for people who may need extra levels of attention—elderly people, parents with babies in tow, people with disabilities, people with high levels of anxiety.

They respect their customers. They give them the time and attention the customers need to resolve their needs. They make their customers feel like valued partners in their company's success, not just account numbers and statistics. They listen, they empathize, they take charge.

If you can do this, you will surely be a valued member of your company's team providing high levels of customer service. You will win the loyalty of your valuable customers. And you will become the kind of person who succeeds at every level of the company as you advance through the ranks over the years.

Summary:

- The majority of customers who leave a company do it because of bad customer service from a single person.
- It costs five times as much to obtain a new customer as to retain an old one.
- The best way to create a favorable impression is to give a customer your full attention and handle their questions or complaints effectively.
- The three key phases of customer service are to listen, empathize, and take charge.
- The best customer service workers look for opportunities to help, respect their customers, and treat their customers as valued partners in the company's success.