

10 Essentials for Great Customer Service

I think most of us will acknowledge that we actually buy what we want, not what we need.

So, how do we, as business owners, give our customers what they want? Assuming that our products and services are great value for money, it's essential that we support our products and services with great customer service, every time.

I was taken aback recently when I saw an employment notice in a [Good Life Pizza Restaurant](#) window (I love their free-range roasted duck pizza, but I digress). It said something like: 'Looking for staff who care about customer service.' Really? What's happening these days, where it needs to be spelled out that a care factor is important in a customer service role?! I've always experienced great customer service at Good Life (no doubt because that's a not negotiable in their business), but sadly, I've experienced some shocking customer service, to the point where a cafe waitress argued with my girlfriend, when she very patiently pointed out that she hadn't actually received what she'd ordered.

Here are my thoughts on 10 essentials for great customer service:

- 1. Employ the right people in customer service roles:** When hiring people for roles it's so important that you choose wisely. Not everyone is suited to a customer service role and, regardless of the amount of training and support provided, some people will just always be square pegs in round holes. So, hire staff wisely! Make use of one of the many behavioural profiling tools available on the market, such as Harrison Assessments offered by the delightful Don Dobie at [Employment Profiling](#), to assess candidates before offering them a position, and conduct reliable competency-based interviews too, such as those taught by recruitment expert Bridget Hogg of [HR Development at Work](#).
- 2. Greet your customers when they arrive. Thank them when they leave:** How you greet your customer creates an impression - good or bad - so make a good start by greeting them in a genuine way. Also, always thank your customers for their patronage, order, or even just for making an enquiry or stopping by to look. It could positively influence their decision to come back and buy, and shows something of your character and gratitude for their business.
- 3. Stay in touch:** Regularly connect with your customers and keep them informed of anything that might be relevant or important to them. You can do this both personally by calling or emailing them, and by sending out regular updates, catalogues or newsletters, electronically or by mail.

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4. **Apologise if there is a problem and fix it quickly:** Why are people so reluctant to say 'I'm sorry, we'll fix that for you right away'? People can accept honest mistakes, however, a total lack of acknowledgement of any mistake on the sales assistant's or service provider's part is just unenlightened.
5. **Never judge a potential customer by their appearance:** I'm often appalled by the instances of differential treatment I've seen given to customers in clothing and other retail stores. Just because a customer might look good or be well dressed, it doesn't make them any more deserving of a sales assistant's attention. I've experienced being treated like a VIP when I've been dressed in business clothes and heels, and being completely ignored when I've been in jeans. I've had the same amount of money to spend each time, in fact, I've had more time to spend money when I'm not between clients, but guess how inclined anyone is to buy from a person who ignores them compared to when they've been offered personal attention?
6. **Be present, aware and empathetic to your customer's wants and needs:** Ask open questions and listen attentively to discover what your customer is looking for and needing from you. I was recently served by a woman who was like a zombie. After I'd made my payment she looked at me quizzically and then asked me if she'd given me my change. She was miles away in her own little world!
7. **Be helpful:** If a product isn't in stock, suggest an alternative and, rather than just point a customer in the right direction of a particular item, take them to it.
8. **Make every aspect of the buying experience as easy and enjoyable as possible:** Have an easy-to-navigate website, highlight parking options if you're in a busy location, offer assistance in carrying heavy or awkward purchases, provide a play area for children, interesting magazines, a coffee machine, or even have TV in your waiting room or anywhere people need to queue for any period of time. Anything you can do to alleviate sources of frustration will be welcomed and appreciated by your customers.
9. **Give a little extra:** Surprise and delight your customers by giving them something extra or unexpected. It can be as little or big as you like. Something unexpected is a lovely gesture that adds to the pleasure of doing business with you. Just in the last week, I've received a mint chocolate with my restaurant bill, a voucher for a complimentary wheel alignment and balance when I purchased new car tyres (thanks to my gardener Brad of Eco Urban Gardens who pointed out that I needed them - a nice extra in itself!) and convenient, after-hours delivery at home of a framed portrait photo (of the grandchildren for my mother-in-law's 70th) by [Photography by Dale](#).
10. **Follow up:** Whenever you provide a quote for work, follow it up within a week. It shows you care about your potential customer, while not following up can signal that you don't really care one way or other. The person might still be interested in buying your product or service. They simply might not have called you yet because they have had other priorities, and as time goes on, if you don't follow them up, they will most likely choose another supplier who does!

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