

## Guide: Customer service

### Introduction

Good customer service is easy.

Once you have been through the hard work of attracting customers, and have successfully sold them something, you will want to encourage repeat business. It is far easier to sell more to your existing customers than it is to find new ones.

One of the keys to attracting new customers and keeping existing customers is your customer service.

Good customer service is very easy to give, whereas changing a customer's mind once you have let them down is very very difficult.

Plan your business' customer service culture and stick to it. Post a list of customer service tips in your staff area and ensure everyone follows them.

### Set your service up right

#### *Start with the right people*

All team members who come into contact with customers, particularly reception, front of house and sales people, need to have the right attitude.

You can give a team member more skills and knowledge through training, but a good attitude cannot be taught.

If a team member has a negative attitude, or worse, no attitude at all, move them away from the customers before it impacts on your business.

#### *Educate your team*

Your team members should be armed with as much knowledge as possible. If a customer has to go somewhere else for the information they need e.g. the internet or another business, you have lost them.

Give your team the tools and authority they need to look after customers well.

#### *Reward and recognise*

Recognise your team members' outstanding customer service and publicly reward them for it.

#### *Happiness is key*

Happy team members = happy customers = happy business.

Focus on making your business a happy place to work and the rest will take care of itself.

## Planning your customer service style

### *What is a style*

You may already have your own style, but it is important as a business owner, that all of your staff take a similar approach to customer service.

This generally falls into one of two categories: The Best Mate or the Butler.

#### *The Best Mate*

One successful approach to customer service is the Best Mate approach.

This is where you treat your clients as equals, but as good friends who you would do anything for. You may

tease them and push the boundaries, but never lean into the disrespectful.

When you build a community of customers who see you as a friend, they are more likely to take your advice, trust your judgement and also bring their own friends into your circle.

The best mate approach relies on trust so keep your promises. Give your clients the heads up when you have a new product or service you think they'd enjoy.

Keep their experience personal and ensure your team members know the client's name, preferences and can help the customer just as well as you can.

### ***The Butler***

The Butler approach is about good old-fashioned service. Clients are addressed as Sir or Madam and introduced as Mr or Mrs.

The Butler is knowledgeable but subservient, and is polite and patient at all times.

The customer feels special and valued and knows they're in capable hands. They won't hesitate in recommending your business as you're the soul of professionalism.

The Butler approach relies on discretion and professionalism, so no banter around the clients or gossip. Always ensure everything is followed up and right the first time.

This approach works well when each team member has certain clients they look after — the client feels special and the business holds a certain type of exclusivity.

### ***Conclusion***

In reality most business' customer service culture floats between these two and the nature of the business and the personality of the business owner will generally determine what approach the customer service takes.

The main thing to take away is that the entire business' customer service needs to be consistent across all team members. If a team member is not naturally suited to a customer service role, some things can be learned, but the safest solution is to move the team member into a role with less client contact.

## **Top tips for great customer service**

### ***Listen***

No matter what the client is saying, you need to be completely present. Listen to what they have to say and respond accordingly.

The customer is not the enemy. Orders, invoicing, pricing and quoting can wait — the client talking to you should always be your sole focus.

### ***Acknowledge***

If you have walk-in customers ensure they are always acknowledged immediately. But be careful sales staff — you don't have to harass them to let them know you're aware of their presence.

If a client emails, email them back immediately, even just to say you will follow up tomorrow.

### ***Help***

Consider yourself there to solve problems, whether you are solving the problem by providing the right product or service, or by making a phone call to a distributor, service provider or business associate.

### ***Keep your promises***

We've all heard it before — under promise and over deliver. Never ever promise something you cannot deliver on.

If you do promise the world to make a sale, be prepared to make it happen personally, don't expect someone else to make it happen for you.

If you say you'll call back by 3pm, call back by 3pm.

### ***Follow up***

If you pass something on to a third party, always ensure you know the outcome for your customer.

Don't let another business' poor customer service affect yours.

### ***Be professional***

You can be friendly without being unprofessional.

Malicious gossip, complaints and general griping have no place in customer relationships.

### ***Value***

Even if the client or prospective client is not buying something from you right now, they may come back and they will certainly tell others if you treat them badly.

All queries have merit. If you can help someone on the spot, even for free, they will come back and bring others.

Value every customer whether they are paying you money or not.

### ***Don't judge***

Never take a client at face value. The scruffiest, most downtrodden-looking person may be a business-savvy millionaire. The well-dressed, charmer may be a thief.

Treat every customer as you would expect to be treated and refrain from passing judgement.

### ***Keep cool***

No matter how frustrating a situation, never get angry or defensive.

Your client may be having a terrible day and you are just bearing the brunt of it. Maybe a product has broken or a service has been performed badly. Don't take it personally.

Be a practical problem solver and take it as a personal challenge to send them away with a smile on their face.

## **Delivering great service**

### ***Mystery Shopper***

If you need to spot-check your business' customer service, consider hiring a mystery shopper to go through a typical customer experience. Have that person report back on how they were treated and what they experienced.

Start with a phone call where the shopper asks a prescribed question, then have the person walk in off the street and make an appointment or shop for a product.

### ***Put systems in place***

Professional customer service relies on good systems that all team members follow, for example procedures for answering the phone in a professional manner or greeting customers when they walk through the door.

No matter who a customer deals with in your business, they should receive the same high levels of service.

Having a basic systems manual and some checklists will help your team deliver consistently good customer service.

### **Disclaimer**

Stephen Larsen and Co has provided this report on the understanding that:

1. The report is a guide only and should not form the sole basis for any decision without first obtaining proper professional advice.

2. We will not be responsible for and expressly disclaim liability, whether under contract or negligence:

(a) For the results of any use made by users of the report

(b) For any errors or omissions in this report

(c) For any direct or consequential loss or damage to arising from the use of this report, whether to a direct purchaser of this report or to any other person who may borrow or use them

(d) If any part of the report, whether used in its original form or altered in some way by the user, proves invalid or does not attain the result desired by the user

(e) For any negligence in the publication or preparation of these reports

3. This disclaimer extends to the user and to any client of the user who suffers loss as a result of the use of these reports.

4. The user acknowledges that it has not told us any particular purpose for which these reports are required and that it has not relied on our skill or judgement to provide a paper suitable for any such purpose.

### **Intellectual Property Notice**

Stephen Larsen and Co:

1. Holds the exclusive authority to use all copyright, trademarks and other intellectual property rights comprised in this paper.

2. Does not allow these rights nor any part of this paper to be used, sold, transferred, licensed, copied or reproduced in whole or in part in any manner or form whatsoever without its prior written consent.

Last reviewed on 30 June 2020

Important: Clients should not act solely on the basis of the material contained in this article. Items herein are general comments only and do not constitute nor convey advice per se. Changes in legislation may occur quickly. We therefore recommend that our formal advice be sought before acting in any of the areas. This article is issued as a helpful guide to our clients and for their private information. Therefore it should be regarded as confidential and should not be made available to any person without our prior approval.