

How to Use this White Paper

The most powerful tool you have for creating customer service excellence is the mindset of your customer-contacting staff. This article will give your team members specific strategies they can use to create strong customer loyalty and grow repeat business.

Use this white paper at staff meetings. Consider incorporating it into your customer service training and employee on-boarding. Read through the article as a team, then discuss specific examples of similar situations that your staff members may have encountered.

Consider talking through the strategies and asking your employees to provide consider scenarios where the strategies could be used and even to look for opportunities to use them. At future meetings, ask them to share stories and celebrate successful customer interactions.

CHANGE YOUR MIND: Watch Your Repeat Business Soar with a Slight Mental Shift

written by Marilyn Suttle and Lori Jo Vest

Have you ever heard the phrase “what happens on the inside shows up on the outside?” It’s an interesting idea that plays out to perfection for human beings everywhere. One simple example is nutrition’s effect on your physical body. Eat too much junk food and your body will be adversely affected. Beauty experts tout drinking large quantities of water as a surefire way to keep your youthful complexion. It’s true intellectually, too. What’s on your mind will determine how you act.

In our customer service book, *“Who’s Your Gladys? How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan,”* we interviewed ten companies that provide exceptional service to their customers. These companies have won awards, pushed through economic downturns and grew their businesses with longterm customer loyalty. These champions of customer service know that it’s how they look at the world and think about their customers that makes them so successful.

“How you think about and look at the world around you influences what happens in your life.”

If you’re optimistic, odds are you move through life with a happy exterior, too. You expect good things, find it easier to recover from setbacks and feel good about your life. Research shows that optimistic people perform better at school, work and sports; recover quicker from surgeries; and even live longer than pessimists. If you’re a pessimist, you most likely expect to be treated poorly and probably present a grouchy face to the world. As a result of your crabby exterior, people aren’t as kind to you as they might otherwise be.

It’s long been known that expectations directly affect results. In 1963, researcher Robert Rosenthal discovered that a teacher’s beliefs about students directly affect student performance. Rosenthal conducted an experiment wherein he told a teacher, at the beginning of a school year, that only certain children in her class had achieved IQ test scores in the top 20%. The pupils whose names were listed as having the high scores were chosen at random from the class list. At the end of the year, when the students were tested, those who had been

designated as having higher scores scored higher. The teachers' expectations had influenced the children's performance.

How can this information help you better serve your customers and get more referral business? Service goes much deeper than just "how you act." It's how you think that will determine your success with your customers. When you believe that customers are a challenge to be dealt with, your customers will probably be more difficult. They'll push your buttons and generally give you a hard time. If you choose to become a "learned optimist" - focused on staying in a positive mindset when you're at work, no matter what happens around you - you'll inevitably get better results. Your customers will come back again and again.

GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

Have you ever noticed that the person who stops you from having what you most desperately want is often you? Your intellectual mind knows what you need to do. Want to be more physically fit? Your intellect says, "Exercise regularly and put down that cookie." Unfortunately, emotions have a way of trumping intellect.

This intellect versus emotion conflict appears in customer service, too. In all likelihood, you want your customers to be happy. You want them to refer others to you, and you want to be savvy enough to resolve any troubling customer service situations with ease. That's a logical desire.

Yet it isn't easy to respond logically when emotions are running high. When a customer is complaining or you're faced with an uncomfortable conversation with a coworker, do you want to run and hide? When you've made a mistake and you have to tell someone about it, do you procrastinate managing the situation? How do you get out of your own way and do the right thing?

Here are three suggestions:

1. Give Up Your Assumptions.

When you find yourself feeling frustrated, grumbling about an ongoing issue, or angry at a customer, it's an indicator that you need to take a deep breath and look at the situation from a new vantage point. Try putting aside assumptions and looking at just the facts.

For example, let's say you have a customer who insists on a better price than you can offer. He is relentless and demanding. He knows what he wants and he knows what he wants to pay for it. He refuses to look at any of the mattresses that are within his price range. What assumptions are you likely to make about this man? Perhaps "he's being unreasonable" or "he's cheap" or

even, “this guy is my worst nightmare.” However, if you choose to look strictly at the facts, you might think, “I’m here with a man who wants a lower price than I can give him.”

This last response, which is fact-based, leaves you free to respond instead of reacting emotionally. Your tone of voice and body language will soften and you will send a very different message to that customer, something more compassionate. When you come from a place of compassion, you can more easily think of an appropriate, customer-friendly response.

Try, “I wish I could give you the price you want for this bed. If it were possible, I would do it. What I can do is offer is x, y, or z in that price range. Which one would you like to look at first?”

Giving up assumptions can be challenging. One way you can start immediately is to ask yourself “what if?” whenever you feel a negative judgment coming on. For example, what if your customer isn’t being rude, he’s just worried about money? What if he has his heart set on this one mattress? What if he’s afraid of spending too much? How would that change your assumption about, and your behavior toward, that customer?

2. Focus on the Big Picture.

Before you start your day, imagine ending your shift knowing that your customers were delighted with you. Imagine your happy customers telling family and friends to buy their next mattress from you. After all, every customer interaction could contribute to higher sales for you and your store.

This thought pattern creates customer service champions. Champions see challenges as opportunities to test their abilities and grow into the next level of success. Champions aren’t satisfied with satisfactory. They strive for excellence. If you focus on being the champion of service excellence before you respond to a service issue, how might it change the way you handle tough situations?

When you see yourself as a champion of customer service, you will feel like a champion. You will look forward to being the person to assist a distressed customer because you’ll know you have the competence to do so successfully, You will probably even enjoy the challenge of turning an angry customer into a vocal advocate.

3. Discover Your Passion.

Some people love working with facts and statistics, others hate it. Some like working with their hands, others detest it. Some have a passion for serving customers; others develop excellent customer service skills because they have a passion for developing skills. Get in touch with your passion and put it to work at work. Do you have a passion for problem solving? Making people

happy? Ferreting out the best possible negotiation? People who put passion into their work are happier and more productive. They inspire coworkers and naturally attract customers.

REFRAME WHAT YOU SEE

One of the companies featured in "Who's Your Gladys?" is Professional Movers, a residential and corporate moving company in Michigan. One of their biggest customer segments is senior citizens. These customers are often leaving their homes of decades and are struggling with this major life change. When their senior customers are being crabby or angry or ridiculous, the staff at Professional Movers purposely "see" the behavior in its best possible light. They practice "reframing."

Reframing is a behavioral technique where you decide the "frame" through which you will see something that happens in your life. You give the situation its meaning and get to decide the context through which you see it. For example, if a Professional Movers' customer is being forced to move out of their house to a retirement community, they are experiencing high levels of negative emotion. These pros don't take it personally when they come across a cranky customer. Instead, they see them as a person who is going through a difficult time. Reframing the way you see a cranky customer helps you stay in a positive, helpful mindset and makes the experience easier for them.

Let's take a look at an example and some possible ways to reframe it. Suppose a man comes to your store and becomes very impatient when he has to wait a minute or two until one of your store's sales staff can come over and talk to him. He's complaining loudly to his wife that your store has "crappy service" and acts rude when you approach him to offer your assistance. In this case, you could choose to see him and the situation in several different ways. Here are a few examples:

IF YOU FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE:

"This customer is probably eager to buy something, so let me see what I can do to help him feel appreciated and move the process forward." YOU WILL: Say "thank you for your patience" and give him attentive service because you're focused on the end result of a sale.

IF YOU PUT YOURSELF IN THE CUSTOMER'S SHOES:

"No wonder he's angry, I get angry when I have to wait, too."

YOU WILL:

See things from his perspective, so you don't get defensive. You'll want to solve the problem for him as you'd want it solved for you.

HOW TO TURN AROUND A BAD ATTITUDE

Let's say you woke up late this morning. The coffee can was empty and your son missed the bus. Your day started out as a complete mess. Your attitude? "Why me?" As you drove to work, you thought of some tasks you forgot to complete yesterday and you pictured the whole day being busy and stressful. Under those circumstances, how could you possibly be "optimistic?" You feel like you have too much to do, not enough time to do it and everything is going wrong. Yet, you have to deal with customers all day and try to make the most of it. Should you just shut up, smile and put on a fake performance?

Not "fake" but "embody"

Self-help professionals recommend that you embody the role of "happy and optimistic" the way actors embody their roles, and you'll soon feel happier and more optimistic. We're not suggesting that you deny or suppress your feelings. Instead, we're suggesting you change your outlook. How would you act if you could shake off the negativity of a rough morning and start fresh? Imagine what it would feel like, then act "as if" you feel that way. This exercise will help you pivot to a positive attitude.

A focus on gratitude

Another great way to turn around a bad attitude is to focus on gratitude. Start by thinking of three things for which you're grateful. Do you have close friends? Is your family healthy? Does your car run well? Do you love your dog? Find something small that makes you feel good and think about it for a minute or two. Then think of something else that is going well for you for another few minutes. By the time you've thought of three or four, you'll be in a much more positive state of mind.

If you're really having a tough time turning around your mood, make a habit of creating this list every night before you go to bed. Keeping a gratitude journal at your bedside can help you develop a helpful new habit of focusing on what's going right. This action alone can increase your happiness significantly over just a few months. You will inevitably bring this more positive energy into your business life, too, so it will become easier to provide excellent service.

DON'T CATCH ANYONE ELSE'S BAD MOOD

Moods can be contagious. Imagine you have a throbbing toothache. You sit down in the dentist's chair in pain. The dentist enters the room in a cheerful mood. If you catch the dentist's

mood, you relax a bit and she breezes through the procedure. If the dentist catches your mood, what would happen? She'd wince when you winced. As your knuckles turn white grabbing the arms of the chair, her knuckles turn white grabbing her instruments. As your panic grows, her panic grows. You would probably never go back to that dentist again.

People in helping professions meet others sadness, anger, and pain with an attitude of acceptance and a belief in their ability to make a difference. Imagine meeting your customer's hostile moods with acceptance and a belief in your ability to help them feel better.

To respond helpfully, start by understanding that it is okay for customers to feel what they feel. It's okay for a customer to feel disappointed about a purchase. It's okay for a customer to feel angry about delivery fees. There's nothing "wrong" with their feelings. It's easier for customers to return to good feelings once their bad feelings are accepted. When you're comfortable with their upset, it's easier for them to switch gears, cope with their frustrations and move forward.

To keep a customer's hostile mood from spreading to you, take a moment to challenge yourself to choose your mood. If a customer shows anger and you reflect irritation or defensiveness, their anger grows. If you respond with compassion, it changes the dynamic. For example, in a mood of compassion, you can say, "I can see how angry you feel. You were expecting your delivery by 6 p.m. and it's nearly 9 p.m. I am so sorry. I'll call the driver and get this straightened out."

SEE THE GIFT IN EVERY COMPLAINT

Complaints are, as Martha Stewart would say, "a good thing," even though it certainly doesn't feel good to hear them. A study by British research firm BDO Stoy Hayward revealed that due to current economic conditions, customers are more sensitive than ever to service issues, even "hypersensitive." Seventy-four percent will leave without buying anything if they perceive poor customer service. You may never know what caused them to leave because most customers don't bother to tell you. Your complainer is actually a gift, telling you about something that in all likelihood is affecting your other customers. When customers take the time to complain, it means they care enough to do so.

Though it can be uncomfortable to be on the receiving end of an angry tirade, it can give you some useful information. The key to getting value out of a complaint is to not take it personally. The customer is angry with the company, not with you personally. And even if it's you she's complaining about, it's helpful to understand the customer's perception. When you receive a complaint:

1. Thank the customer for complaining.

- "Thank you so much for telling me how unhappy you are.
- "Please tell me more."

- “I want to be sure to understand what went wrong.”

2. Follow up with the customer.

- Document the complaint
- Figure out what can be done to change procedures or policies so that others won't experience the same problem.
- Then call the complaining customer and tell them what your company has decided to do to make the situation less likely to occur in the future.

3. Have service recovery tools and know how to use them.

When things go wrong, what customers most want is a genuine apology and someone to listen to them.

Ask, ***“What can we do to set this right for you?”*** Often the customer simply wants to feel like he's being treated fairly. Sometimes atonement might also include a coupon or a gift card of some sort. Offer the gift saying, *“I'm so sorry this happened. It isn't how we usually do things around here. Please accept this as a token of our apology.”*

Skillfully managing a complaint gives you the chance to show the customer who you are - a problem-solving service professional who cares. It's often after a complaint is handled brilliantly that customers become raving fans. Knowing this, you can see the potential of a happy patron at the onset of a customer meltdown.

KEEPING IT ALL IN MIND

What's happening in the privacy of your own thoughts comes through loud and clear to your customers. Research shows that 55% of what you communicate is nonverbal, so managing your thoughts is a critical part of your success. Consider your thoughts as seeds for the future. What do you want to nurture? Use the tools you've just read about to ensure that you are performing at the top of your game when it comes to customer care. It's a surefire way to create raving fans and win a high rate of referral business.

BONUS EXTRAS:

What Would Happen If You Gave Them What They Want?

Jesse Iannello is a young professional employed by Jack Canfield, who's known as “America's #1 Success Coach.” She was featured in our book, “Who's Your Gladys?” because she believes that exceeding customer expectations is simply “the thing to do.” Jesse is responsible for guiding thousands of people through Canfield's personal growth seminars

every year. At one conference, she had a customer who was incredibly bold - bold enough to request a mini-refrigerator be brought into the hotel training room to keep his snacks cold throughout the day.

Rather than making negative assumptions like, "He's trying to take advantage of me," or "he's being ridiculous," Jesse asked herself, "Can this be done?" She made a quick inquiry with the hotel and discovered that not only would they be willing to bring a mini-refrigerator in the room, but there would be no charge to do so. She made a customer extremely happy and it took less than five minutes.

How many people do you know who would have dismissed it as an outrageous request from an outrageous customer? What keeps Jesse in her service mindset is her unwavering belief that customers have their own reasons for making requests and making assumptions about those reasons is useless. Jesse thinks like a service excellence champion, keeping her mind free to give even the most unlikely requests appropriate consideration. As a result of Jesse's efforts, the Jack Canfield Company is thriving with many loyal devoted customers and a steady stream of referrals.

10 Phrases Customers Love

1. Yes!
2. I'll be happy to.
3. How can we make your next visit with us even better?
4. Hello, I'm (name). Is there anything I can do to help you?
5. I remember that you liked x, y, and z the last time you were here.
6. Is there anything else I can do for you?
7. Thank you so much for your business.
8. I got your message and I'm returning your call with the answer you requested.
9. I will do everything I can to make this right.
10. I appreciate your honest feedback. It's the only way we can improve.