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In The Customer's Shoes

by John Tschohl, Founder and President, Service Quality Institute, Minneapolis, MN - December 15, 2015

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Every business, small or large—should understand what skills their customer-facing employees need and should know how to speak to customers in order to foster a positive and long-standing relationship. Put yourself in the customer's shoes: do things for them the way that you would want to have done for you.

All businesses have customers and have a customer-facing experience every single day. There are sales people, project managers, cashiers, waitresses and waiters, presidents, vice presidents, every person in the business is dealing with customers in one way or another.

All of these people will mean the difference between a company that is perceived positively and a company that appears not to care.

It's about communication. If you are going to have a chance to win customer satisfaction you need to know what the customer thinks—your customer, not the “average” customer who populates national economic statistics.

Costco is in the people business. One of the most customer-centric companies I know of is Costco. Their strategy is to provide members with a broad range of high-quality merchandise at prices consistently lower than could be obtained through traditional wholesalers, mass merchandisers, supermarkets and supercenters. It carries only merchandise in which it can provide members significant cost savings.

In 2015 Costco had 81 million members

Costco was the first company to grow from zero to \$3 billion in sales in under six years. For the fiscal year ending on August 31, 2012, the company's sales totaled \$97.062 billion, with \$1.709 billion net profit. Costco is 19th on the 2014 [Fortune 500](#). The ACSI (The American Customer Satisfaction Index) named Costco number one in the specialty retail store industry with a score of 84 in 2014.

Given that about 75 percent of Costco's operating profit comes from membership fees alone, literally every decision Costco makes comes down to... **what the member wants**. And members are evidently happy: the warehouse chain has a renewal rate of nearly 90 percent.

The Key to Customer Satisfaction:

- **Listen and solve customer problems fast**...dramatically shorten the time it takes to complete any task for customers and co-workers.
- **Give customers your opinion**, not one read off a piece of paper...they don't want to hear stupid rules that are in place, they want to hear from a person that is empowered to make decisions on their behalf.
- **Be proactive to find the solutions**...customers look for people to solve a problem and do it within a reasonable amount of time.
- **Be reliable**...customers want to feel comfortable dealing with someone they know and can count on to handle a situation.
- **Take charge**...customers want professional expertise, someone to give guidance and direction.
- **Ask customers for feedback and let them know it is important**...it makes them feel important and that their opinions matter.
- **Be an advocate for the customer**...customers are looking for a consultant. They want you to listen to them and

provide them with a solution.

- **Have a positive attitude**...customers do not want to hear about how bad your day has been. Focus on them and on helping them solve their problems

Customer Communication. The American management Association found in a survey that “high-growth companies” stay in touch with their markets and willingly spend the money to do so. They know their customers and they keep their knowledge fresh.

They learn things that you cannot learn any other way.

- They learn whether they’re satisfied.
- They learn what they bought and what they didn’t buy and why.
- They learn what they came in expecting to buy and to pay.
- They learn preferences and how they are changing over time.

Wowing on a regular basis. Since day one Costco has had an unwavering commitment to doing the right thing for their members, employees, suppliers and the community. Their strategy is to make sure its customers come back. Its merchandisers are meticulous about their choices of product for their customers and have set detailed standards on everything from the size of cashews to the thread count of bed sheets.

That unbeatable value proposition on quality products and customer service has inspired roughly 90% of Costco’s 81 million cardholders worldwide to renew their memberships each year. Now that’s how you spell **customer service!**

John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru, he has written several books on customer service. He just released the 10th Edition of Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service. The Service Quality Institute (<http://www.customer-service.com>) has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. John’s monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

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