

WE OUR CUSTOMERS



Strategy & Planning

7 ways to better serve customers



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Some financial organizations seem to think that customer service is easy. They make a few pronouncements from the head office, maybe run a few stories in the employee newsletter and even go so far as to send middle management to listen to a motivational speaker so they will share with the rest of the company and now... they are confident they have “service.”

In service-driven banks, dependable service is a way of life. It is important to know your customers’ wants and needs before you try to sell them a financial service or a product. If you do not know, then you are guessing. Guesswork makes dissatisfaction inevitable.

The “culture” of an organization is best defined as a consensus favoring good service. It is understood and routinely accepted that customers will receive satisfaction and value for their money, they will be treated like friends, and questions and complaints will be handled quickly.

Companies with a service culture make sure that service is discussed at every management meeting, every plan and report...every decision. Every employee knows that their bank gives outstanding service. That’s the bank’s reputation, its image!

Every financial institution, 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.

Here are seven simple (but effective) guidelines for better customer service:

- **Be more interested in your customers and you will build rapport.** Your focus should be on finding something in common. Make friends first. Because not everyone feels comfortable in a bank, your goal is to make customers feel that you are someone they can trust. Someone they can believe. Someone they can do business with.
- **Learn to ask questions that uncover issues or challenges that your customer is facing.** You can then position yourself as a solution to those issues. How do you know what information is helpful to your customers? How about asking them? Be prepared for the response and don't panic if you get more negative response than positive. Negativity provides you with a great opportunity to proactively address and fix customer grievances. Often that can result in a customer who is happier than if they'd never had a problem to begin with.
- **Listen more to learn more.** Ask questions and listen, without interrupting. Pay attention to what is important to your customer. Reply to both criticism and praise in a genuine, empathetic way.
- **Learn to be silent.** Give your customer time to finish before you jump in with new thoughts of your own. Your silence is an opportunity to listen not only for words and ideas, but for feelings. As you listen to people, look for opportunities to ask questions based on what you hear. You should never be so focused on what you have to say that you forget to listen. It's well worth the time it takes to listen. Listening multiplies the value of the information you receive. You can also gain a reputation for courtesy and concern for others—positive traits for success.
- **Tune in to THEIR problems and issues.** Think about how your financial product or service can provide a solution. And if it can't, is there anyone you can refer them to? If you can help the person, you've just started a new relationship. Make all customer conversations two-way. The potential peril of being eager about your product is that you can overwhelm a customer and not give them the opportunity to get a word in edgewise.
- **Avoid wandering and scanning eyes.** Concentrate on that person. Regardless if you are a personal loan officer or teller, your goal is one-on-one attention. Send the right message; physically face the person completely. The most offensive thing you can do is to look around the room as if you are trying to spot someone to hand this person off to.
- **Word of Mouth.** People refer business to people they know, like and trust. Think about when you needed a financial service. Chances are you asked some friends who they would recommend if you didn't know someone yourself. It pays to know as many people as possible who will give your name when asked for a recommendation for the type of service or solution you offer.

Apply all these tips internally first. Once you start practicing on each other, you will be surprised at your employees' ability to simplify their approach and engage with customers. The return for them and your bank will be multiplied many times over.