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Building Rapport With Your Customers

by John Tschohl, Founder and President, Service Quality Institute, Minneapolis, MN - February 11, 2016

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I enjoy meeting people and helping people. Not for what it can get me but what I can learn about others. I try to always be authentically me and represent my business honestly and build genuine relationships with my customers. When I stick to this strategy, the financial rewards flow.

- Be more interested in your customers and you will build rapport. Your focus should be on finding something in common. Make friends first. 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.
- Listen more to learn more. Ask questions and listen, without interrupting. Pay attention to what is important to your customer.
- 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. Its 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 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. • Avoid wandering and scanning eyes. Concentrate on that person. 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 service provider. 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.

In my book Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service I wrote—Service is defined by listing its function—maintaining old customers, attracting new customers, and leaving all customers with an impression of the company that induces them to do business with the company again. Expressed in terms of attitude, service is:

- Thoughtfulness
- Courtesy
- Integrity
- Helpfulness
- Efficiency
- Availability
- Friendliness
- Knowledge
- Professionalism

Bringing your Customer Service to a new level can enhance the experience your customers have every time they step through the door.

Service means different things to different people. At the lowest level service is something a customer is not entitled to, but you give to him as a gift. At a somewhat higher level, service means focusing on customer transactions but only fixing something if it is broken. At the highest level, the aim of service is to deliver more than the customer expects. Good service no longer gets you in the game. Only consistent exceptional service will create loyal customers.

I guarantee you will bring your customer service to a new level by providing top notch service to every single customer, every single day. If you make it your aim to build rapport with your customers by involving them in your day-to-day operations, they will give you back ten-fold the information and friendship you need to be a success.

Most companies have a mission statement: an easy to remember sentence or paragraph illustrating the business's goals and purpose. Disney's mission statement says, "To make people happy". Boeing's says, "To push the leading edge of aviation, taking huge challenges doing what others cannot do". 3M's says, "To solve unsolved problems innovatively". Note that these companies' missions are not to make a profit; profit is the outcome of and reward for fulfilling the mission. Now that's what I'm talking about!

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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