

StartUp

## The gold standard of service

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We've all seen the well-worn proclamations taped to the wall near the front counter of a business: "The customer is king," or "The customer is always right." The reality?

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Those are just words, says John Tschohl, founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minn. Customers will decide for themselves what kind of service you really provide through their experiences. "You must act, not profess," Tschohl says. "You must make customer service a priority. You must do whatever it takes to provide your customers with what they need and want and to do so quickly, enthusiastically, and accurately." Here are his suggestions for what to consider before creating a customer service plan:

**Understand what your business is.** Regardless of what you are selling—life insurance, automobiles, or printing—you are in the customer service business. You must build everything you do around the customer experience.

**Identify the elements of superior customer service.** Eliminate obstacles that prevent you from providing it. How can you make it easy for people to do business with you? Are your hours convenient? Are your employees well trained? Is someone in the organization available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to answer questions and to help solve customer problems?

**Identify your customers' needs and wants.** If you don't know who it is you are trying to satisfy and what customer needs are, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to meet them. Gather information you need to set goals that will include average revenue per customer and the market share you want to achieve.

**Compare your practices to role models outside your industry.** Look at the best of the best and model your conduct after those businesses. What do they do that you don't?

**Track your progress.** Look at your sales and market share before you implement the plan and compare that data with where you are every six months afterwards.

**Drive the program.** Provide continuous training that will instill in all employees an enthusiasm for—and commitment to—customer service. Reinforce the focus on service by rewarding high-performing employees and emphasizing clear service standards.

**Make a commitment.** Creating a customer service culture takes time. If you aren't committed, you are destined to fail.



**Gary Blum**  
SVP, Loan Officer

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