



THE TEN "ESSENTIALS" OF EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Dictionary.com defines "dedication" as "Selfless devotion." Within the business community, a dedication to customer service is the single most important focus of any company that wants not only retain its current clients, but to expand its business. In order to achieve these goals, companies should continually strive to improve their client service efforts.

When your customers experience a disappointing interaction, it is almost always linked to customer service. The customer service representative not only affects a single customer with his or her substandard service, but also damages the overall reputation of the company, jeopardizing future business endeavors. That one customer given mediocre service could be the son, daughter, or colleague of someone who you might have had the potential to create a business relationship with, generating profits for your business.

I will first touch on the number one element of exceptional service, **QUALITY ASSURANCE**. This should be the foundation of every customer service program. If your company doesn't ensure quality customer service, it is time to implement a change and fast! You want the reputation of your company to be built upon this notion. You want to ensure that every contact a client makes with your company is met with responsiveness and outstanding service.

The second element is to **DELIVER WHAT YOU PROMISE**. When you take an order or sign a contract it is mandatory to follow through with what is expected. If you tell a customer that you will return their call in less than an hour, make sure that you do. If more time passes than what you promised, the customer may feel they are not important to you. If something happens and you cannot deliver what you promise, let them know, apologize, and offer some type of consolation.

The third element is **FOLLOWING UP**. This can simply consist of a phone call, a service survey or a quick note in the mail. Sometimes the simplest things can have the highest payback. Always ask your customer if there is anything else you can do for them or to be of better service to them. The best example is in the restaurant business, if your waiter doesn't make an effort to ask if you need anything, a refill, dessert, etc. then you may not feel that your dining experience was enjoyable. This not only reflects badly on the waiter it reflects poorly on the restaurant as a whole.

The fourth element of customer service is **HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE**. Everyone who works in a company has a direct impact on the success of your company. You want employees that care about the direction of the company, not people who are just there to receive a paycheck. Make it clear to them that customer service is your first and highest priority. All employees should give their customers the respect that they deserve. Have a set of values and standards that your company stands for and is accountable for. Make employees understand that keeping established customers happy is just as important as satisfying new customers.



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The fifth element is **PERFORMANCE**. Is your company performing to the best of its abilities? Is it achieving its goals? Is your company excelling in its core business? When companies are consistently evaluating the consistency and effort of their employees and managers they are more apt to improve, expand, and advance their business. Consequently the quality and output will lead to growth, advancement, and a better command of your core areas of expertise.

The sixth element is a follow up to the preceding one, **IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**. This can sometimes be quite tricky because people generally fear change, in and out of the work environment. Some people are unwilling to put forth the time and effort to make effective change. Managers and supervisors also may be reluctant to change policies, procedures, and guidelines because they don't want to “shake things up” or bother with enforcing new rules. This can be a major problem because this can leave your company stagnant, looking outdated and behind the times.

The seventh element is a very critical area in customer service, **KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS AND PRODUCTS**. This might seem to some to be a “no-brainer,” however, if you've ever experienced second-rate customer service this might be one of the explanations. All of your employees should be well versed and trained in the area of your business. You want your employees to have vast knowledge of your products and services. How are they going to sell or offer your services if they sound uninformed and uneducated with your business and offerings? That's why ongoing training is so important, for new employees and employees that have been with your company for a significant amount of time.

The eighth element is **TEAMWORK**, making your company a cohesive, unified organization. When people brainstorm and think together, new ideas and suggestions may be put forth. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses that can play off each other for a favorable outcome. Encourage your employees to unite together on projects and encourage everyone to give their opinions and feedback. Persuade employees to think of themselves as part of a team, not as individual workers. When you have a unified front, your company will be perceived as more organized and professional.

The ninth element of exceptional service is to **HOLD EVERYONE ACCOUNTABLE**. Unless you are a person running a sole proprietorship; this applies to your business. There are times when the blame needs to be put on an individual, just as there are times when a group is at the source of accountability. When an error, or bad judgment is given in business, the person or persons need to be held responsible. When everyone is held accountable for their actions they are less likely to repeat these mistakes. When you don't hold people accountable for their actions these incidents are going to continue until they are brought to attention.

The tenth and final element of providing exceptional customer service picks up where the ninth element left off, **APOLOGIZE AND MEND MISTAKES**. How many times have you been disappointed in service that you have received? Or a mistake was made in something you had ordered? The best approach in handling a mistake that was made is to



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apologize; most people understand when mishaps occur as long as they see you making an effort to correct the mistake. When people are inconvenienced by a mistake you made, action needs to be taken immediately to correct the problem and make the customer content.

In closing, customer service should be at the foundation of any company that wants to survive in today’s competitive market. Treat your customers the way you like to be treated as a customer. Always give everyone respect, customers and employees alike. It is important to leave the customer with a good impression of your company so they will give you repeat business as well as referrals to their friends and co-workers. When you make customer service a priority your business will continue to prosper and flourish.