

Try a Customer Service Formula to Grow Your Business Relationships



How often have you heard someone say, “And then they tried to act like it was MY problem!” Or perhaps you recall someone saying, “I’m never going back THERE again.” The frustration we encounter when faced with poor service becomes all too real when we discuss it, even if the event itself was two, three, or even five years ago. And, it’s well known that people who experience poor customer service will tell other people about their poor experience.

On the other hand, many people who encounter outstanding customer service will continue to patronize businesses long after they have moved some distance away, bypassing more local sources for the very same product or service.

Offering people the type of customer service that can actually add to a relationship—even if ultimately we can’t do what the customer wants—is key.

Do you take charge of your customers’ problems in such a way that they know you are on their side and that you’ll be doing everything possible in an effort to deal with their problems? Think of this approach as empathy in action. It can be a strong signal and confidence builder for a disappointed customer who knows they have little ability to influence the situation. You can be someone who will represent their situation and seek solutions in a manner that is as assertive as they themselves would wish to be.

Try this customer service formula in the next conversation you have:

- Listen. Practice active listening skills, ask questions as needed, and restate information to be sure that you understand correctly.
- Apologize. This doesn’t mean you are accepting blame, but it does express to the customer your regret for this negative situation.
- Offer two-way conversation. Ask open ended questions that can’t be answered with a yes or no to gather information. Summarize and paraphrase in order to get to the root of the problem.
- Determine the best solution together if possible. Allow the customer to offer solutions first and then negotiate from there to hopefully reach an acceptable solution for both parties.
- Explain what will happen next. Discuss next steps, deadlines and other follow-up actions that will be taken to repair the situation.
- Thank them. A sincere thank you at the end of a challenging situation can help restore positive customer opinion. You want the last thing they hear to be a positive comment, but not something trite like, Have a nice day. You want to let the customer know that you appreciate the fact that they called your attention to the problem. This makes them feel like part of the solution.


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Too often we hear of businesses trying to explain away their service failures by stating they don’t have enough employees to meet demand or that an unforeseen event occurred which wreaked some degree of havoc with what we’d been promised. At times some customer service professionals, frustrated themselves no doubt, will go so far as to argue with customers. Hardly a way to add to a business relationship, and yet it happens all the time.

Do you express empathy in a tactful way? Do you let your customers know you understand their disappointment, anger, or frustration when things don’t go as planned? And more importantly, that you don’t blame them for feeling the way they do? Do you call if there’s a delay that will occur; thereby showing them the same type of respect that most of us would like to assume is due?

Step number one in growing business relationships is to keep your current customers satisfied, at a minimum, but hopefully delighted. Every call should be your best call of the day.

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