

## CUSTOMER SERVICE IS NO ACCIDENT

*It's true that the buck stops with the leader of an organization, but when the buck stops because the customer stops walking in the door, it can be a little too late to start asking why they're going to our competitors, not renewing contracts, or worse still not wanting to do business with us again. But go on, be brave ASK your customers what they think – they will still respect you in the morning...*

There is little doubt that the ability to prepare and deliver excellent customer service is one of the most important skill sets that is necessary to succeed in any business. Therefore in order to be a profitable and effective business we need a number of strategic plans in place to be well positioned for success – especially when financial success is part of the deal.

Yes, we need a marketing plan, a communications plan, a strategic plan, and a sometimes we even have a planning day to plan the future.... Yet one plan that is often not prepared or even thought of is a Customer Service Plan. Your Interaction with your customer needs to be well prepared and thought through, strategic and personalized – demonstrating you not only share a common vision with that of your client but are considering what rates high on their list of priorities.

It is no accident when it comes to the delivery of exceptional customer service – the pain comes from failing to prepare, anticipate or respond to the changing needs of the customer who are now more savvy and have greater expectations. Try answering the following 5 actionable strategies for delivering powerful levels of Customer Service in your business, and see the results in the responses you get from your customers.

1. The purpose of this interaction with my customer is to...
2. The 3-5 main points I will ensure my customer is aware of when we leave this meeting will be...
3. The most difficult questions I am likely to be asked after or during my discussion with my customer are...
4. After my interaction with my customer I would like them to feel..., I would like them to action..., I would like them to do...
5. I will measure the impact of effectiveness of my discussion by...

The decision to purchase from a financial service provider happen because something in the customer's business has changed or a need has been identified. So here is the service provider's opportunity to focus on that need and respond to it in a timely way. To have your clients say "We buy or want to do business with you because you use the skills you talk about and take

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action appropriately” is not only a great compliment to hear, but testimony to the fact that people want to work with people who share and demonstrate common values and ethics.

When your Customer Service extends beyond the delivery of the product and beyond the delivery of the everyday service to include respect and care, your customers will come back, refer you to others and build opportunities for further business. People often remember the emotion behind the situation and it is up to us to acknowledge and respect that emotion.

Your customer’s satisfaction is the true measurement of your service and the true litmus test on service is how you look after them. So it is perhaps immaterial how you see your service. What is important is how your customer perceives (rightly or wrongly) the level of your service. And clearly, you can’t argue with the perceptions or their truths unless you demonstrate alternative actions. The more you know about their experiences, their needs and the impact you are having on their outcomes the more equipped you will be to anticipate what their changing needs may be, how you can best on sell other products, handle difficult or challenging situations and perhaps most important of all, look after their bottom line.

The very nature of the financial services industry points to the impact of this bottom line – both for the customer and for you. The bottom line determines your profits, your losses, and your future. However the relationship between bottom line and customer relationship means more than the present financial situation. Data submitted from my recent Customer Service business survey indicate when a personal as well as professional connection exist between the supplier and the client s the willingness to do and continue to do business can be seen in the bottom line of both businesses.

A recent example of this comes from ANZ Customer Call Centres where ANZ have been voted best Service provider for 2004 and 2005. They have been able, under the leadership of Vicki Shields to dramatically improve customer satisfaction levels up by close to 30% in three years, improve staff satisfaction by over 20% and at the same time reduce costs.

Yes, it takes time to walk the floor, talk to people, find out what they want and what they need – but it takes more time to repair the damage to businesses or build opportunities because we have lost sight of what is really important to our customer – both internal and external.

You are in the business of business and your service goes beyond the delivery of the product. You become the brand and the image of the business. What you do to create that image is everything from your appearance and tonality of your voice to your values and emotional intelligence. This extends to our own internal customer service with the people that we work with daily.

These are the elements that keep your customers coming back and wanting you to continue to service them. Your engagement with your customer depends on your ability to stay fresh and interested in the other party and never become complacent in how you relate to them. In fact the longer you do business with people the more important to focus on anticipating what is coming next rather than what was.

One of the most effective ways to achieve excellent customer service is to keep the dialogue simple, the actions open, focus on people first and the responses in real time. It is no accident that customers do business with us, but it can cause us serious damage if they leave. Safety first – be prepared and stay prepared. Make the right choices that underpin your customer service – and make the right ones. But don’t think you have all the right answers.

But go on, be brave - ask your customers what they think – they will still respect you in the morning.