



4 Characteristics of Quality Customer Service

It's not about Customer Service, It's about Customer Empathy

We bought a new HD television several months ago. I couldn't wait to hook it up and watch the clear picture and special programming. Our cable company swapped me for a new decoder and I thought I was ready. However, I soon discovered that my skills in electronics were no match for HDTV. There were more wires and places to plug them than I had ever seen on a television or a cable box. It was against my nature to read the instructions but I spent one fruitless evening going over them. They were written for someone who already knew what they were doing--not me. So I called the cable company...12 times. Each time I would get advice or promises of advice that never worked. Finally a lady admitted that she didn't understand it either. She handed me over to Technical Support (after 11 calls for help). Latrell answered the phone. I remember his name because he is the only one who actually endeavored to help me. "How can I help you Mr. Mathis?" he said. I began telling him my story. He began quoting the concerns and problem I had back to me. At last I found someone who understood! It only took a few minutes but Latrell pinpointed my problem and came up with a solution. The things he couldn't solve, he agreed to research and call me back in 24 hours. He did.

Is your customer service marked by this type of efficiency? Do you have a group of "Latrell's" handling your Call Center? I called my lawnmower manufacturer to get the part number of a broken drive belt only to be told by the Customer Service Representative (CSR) that they really didn't want people to call in to the Call Center. Is this your experience? So many organizations do not get it. They do not show concern or empathy for their customers and they certainly do not go the extra mile. It is maybe a little thing, but it means everything. What are the characteristics of quality service? What keeps your customers coming back and telling others to come to you?

1. Quality Service is Responsive to Needs. This involves being courteous, asking the right questions, suggesting only what is right for the customer, and not promising what you can't deliver. We switched our cell phone company in December, ahead of the "drop for free" time. The former company never

responded to our needs. They often acted like it was an imposition to help us. We were made to feel like we were the only individuals experiencing problems (I've since found out that almost everyone I've come across who was with them left for the same reason). They kept telling us that the problem would be fixed with the service and it never was. Finally I think they let us go to get rid of us. Either way, we got out of our contract and a into better cell company. Their reception isn't better, but there CSR's are. Truth be known, I was a week away from paying the former company's penalty just to get out of the contract. Sometimes the service can be so bad that you'd be willing to pay just to get away. Do you have customers that would pay anything if they knew there was a better service provider out there?

2. Quality Service is Timely. Timely service doesn't mind taking an extra 5 or 10 minutes to satisfy the customer. It means finding way sot streamline the process and working more efficiently. Now quality service doesn't always have to be speedy. In a conference a few months ago, a participant said she thought her supervisor might not like her taking extra time with a call-in concern. I answered that her boss would love it if the extra time mitigated the concern, rather than postponing it. The supervisor, who was in attendance agreed. Timely doesn't always mean right away. Latrell promised to get back within 24 hours and he did. He agreed to research my questions and come back with answers. He set attainable goals for good service and delivered. Is your CSR team handling concerns in a timely manner? Do your customers know all the words to the bumper music because they've been on hold for so long?

3. Quality Service is Accurate. Accuracy is doing precisely what the customer needs you to do. It is paying attention to what you are being told by your customer. It is asking the right questions to find out precisely what the customer's problems are What do they really need? Great CSR's aren't problem solvers, they are investigators. Only after you have asked questions can you find out what the customer needs. Don't be too quick to solve problems. Start asking about them. Practice active listening. This puts you in charge of the conversation and lets the customer give you information. Look on it as an investigative reporter doing an interview. If the customer is having to ask all the questions they aren't getting their needs met and they are in charge of the conversation. Can your Call Center team be relied upon to do some investigative research? Are they trying to solve the problem too quick? Are they investigators? Do they go out of their way to give accurate service?

4. Quality Service is Complete. Complete means finished. The problem is remedied and the customer is satisfied. The matter is taken care of with the minimum amount of fuss, with courteous and empathetic service. The result? A very happy and grateful customer, ready to sing their praises. Too often CSR's are trained to deal in volume and they don't take the time to make sure that all the needs were met. Again, asking questions is the best way to make sure everything has been taken care of. Specific follow-up is arranged to make sure

that everything was taken care of. Have you ever taken your car in for service and had the dealer call you back several days later to make sure everything is okay? I've even had my doctor's office call me a day or two after a sick visit to see how I was improving. Does your CSR team get the job done? Does it take several calls to get to the remedy of your clients' needs? Are they good at asking, "Is there anything else I can help you with?"

Ask yourself: "How am I going that extra mile for my customers/clients today?" In fact, going the extra mile does not have to be restricted to your professional life. Think of someone who you can make a difference for today in your personal life by going that extra mile.

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