

Mr. Inside Sales

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WHITE PAPER:

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7 Secrets to GREAT Customer Service



Section 1

Introduction

In today's inside sales environment, a customer service rep can wear many hats. Often a blend between pure customer service, where a rep will take inbound calls from existing and potential customers, to an order taking role where the rep will take inbound customer orders, all the way to being tasked with proactive up-selling or prospecting into existing accounts, the reps of today have to adept at handling a number of customer interactions. Across these varying job descriptions, one thing remains constant: giving your customers an outstanding experience. But how do we get them to do this?

Section 2

The problem with most training

While training is crucial to the development of a customer service team, and to the overall experience a customer service rep delivers, the majority of conventional training falls short. Most customer service training is 'top end' heavy and focused on product education and services training, often neglecting the fundamentals of the customer interface experience. Companies tend to take for granted that reps should know intuitively how to make the customer feel welcome and cared for, but, as any of know who have had to call in to our cell phone company or cable TV company, these fundamental, common sense courtesies are anything but common sense intuitive skills.

Section 3

The solution is in proper training and measuring consistency

In order to develop a customer service team that consistently delivers exceptional customer service, we like to start with a definition of customer service and then break this down into the training we consider to be fundamental to overall customer service experience. Here's our definition:

"Customer Service is defined as how well a company is able to consistently exceed the needs of the customer."

We then break this down into what we believe are the fundamental elements to effective customer service training:

- "Is able to" = Customer Service is a set of skills that can be learned.
- "Consistently" – Great Customer Service means doing it all the time (Not just when you feel like it).
- "Exceeds the needs" – Wowing the customer, not just giving them satisfaction.
- "The customer" – Great Customer Service treats the customer as an individual, rather than as a group or company.

In addition to fundamental training, follow up mentoring, coaching and measuring adherence to a set of best practices are also essential for the development, integration and delivery of a 'GREAT' customer service experience.

While many elements make up an effective customer service training program, here are 7 Secrets we use as a base to introduce customer service reps to the fundamentals of delivering a great customer experience:

Secret #1: Consistency is the Secret to Great Customer Service

Think over where you consistently receive GREAT customer service. How about a high end department store like Nordstroms? Or a luxury hotel like the Ritz Carlton chain. How about your local retail shop, coffee shop or favorite restaurant? If you were to choose one word to describe what makes these experiences great, wouldn't it be consistency of experience?

All customers have a baseline expectation they expect to be fulfilled on every interaction with your company. Consistency of experience creates feelings of predictability, trust and feelings of security (your customers know you'll be there for them and that they will be taken care of). The more consistently you're able to meet and exceed your customer's expectations, the more they will want to do business with you and recommend you.

Consistency of experience is the first step to GREAT customer service.

Secret #2 Personality is more important than knowledge

Whenever a customer service rep picks up the phone, you immediately know whether you are in good hands or not, don't you? Their tone, their attitude projects what kind of experience you're going to have. In fact, which customer service rep would you rather speak to:

1: A customer service rep who knows everything but who is not friendly, or

2: A customer service rep who is warm & friendly and willing to help you and will find the answers you need?

As customers, we would rather speak to a friendly, helpful customer service rep whose attitude is: *"Would you mind holding a moment while I find the right person for you to speak with?"* rather than with a rep whose tone is unfriendly or disinterested. In customer service: attitude trumps knowledge.

How do you get your personality across the phone? In one word: Smiling. People can hear it in your voice when you're smiling, and they can hear it when you're not. The secret of pushing your personality across the phone is to "Never stop smiling."

"If one of our customers comes into the store without a smile, I'll give them one of mine." Sam Walton (founder of Wal-Mart)

Secret #3: It's O.K. to make the occasional mistake or not have all the answers.

Too many customer service reps feel like they have to have all the answers and are afraid to make the occasional mistake. And when they do make a mistake, they tend to defend or deny they were wrong. Both are incorrect.

The truth is, we don't have all the answers all the time and we are going to make mistakes or give out incorrect answers occasionally. The key is how you handle this. What to do when you make a mistake:

Admit it. Denying it only makes it worse....

"You know I think I may have given you the wrong (part #, extension, etc.). Let me try that again, please."

Apologize sincerely.

"I'm truly sorry for that." "I apologize for that." "That was my mistake..."

Offer to try to help them again or to re-do what just went wrong.

"Would it be O.K. if I tried that again?"

Thank them for their patience...

"I want to thank you for your patience with this..."

Secret #4: Prevent a customer who is having a problem from becoming a problem customer!

“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.” Bill Gates of Microsoft

A big part of a customer service rep's job is to handle customers who are having a problem. From a company stand point, the key to dealing with these customers successfully is prevent a customer who is having a problem from becoming a problem customer.

Here's how you create a problem customer:

- You don't acknowledge their problem or urgency of situation
- You don't empathize with them
- You pass them off to voice mail
- You don't update them on the solution

The key to preventing problems from escalating? In a word: Be **PROACTIVE!**

Steps to Follow:

- Acknowledge the problem
- Empathize with the customer

Section 4

7 Secrets to GREAT Customer Service

- Clearly lay out the next steps for the customer
- Regular contact with the customer in need of service
- Update them on the progress of the solution
- Check back to make sure problem is solved to their satisfaction

Secret #5: Focus on building a relationship rather than making a transaction

What would you say is the most important aspect of any relationship? We believe that trust is essential to developing an atmosphere of caring and competent support. And how do you build that? By consistently & courteously guiding your customer through every step of your interaction with them. Starting with:

The Opening

Make your customer feel welcomed with a warm opening:

“Thank you for calling (Your Company) today”

“It’s a great day at (Your Company) ...”

“Good afternoon, this is _____ with (Your Company), how can I help you today?”

Continue this in: The Middle of Conversation

Make your customer feel taken care of with:

“I can help you with that.”

“I’ll be happy to help you with that.”

“That’s something I can take care of for you.

And End by: Leaving your customers with a smile

“Thank you for calling us today.”

“Thanks for calling and you have a great day.”

“We appreciate your business and have a great day.”

“If there is anything else we can do for you, just give us a call.”

Always do more than is required of you.

George S. Patton

Secret #6: Courtesy is the #1 tool of EVERY customer service rep

How do you feel when someone lets you in the lane in front of them in traffic? Or how about when someone holds the door for you at the market, or lets you in front of them at the market when you have just a few items? Probably pretty good. And that's how every customer service should make you feel as well. And that's why we say that being courteous and polite are your #1 tools to becoming a GREAT customer service rep!

Your Top Courtesy phrases:

“Please...”

“I'll be happy to help you...”

“Would it be O.K. if I put you on hold?”

“Thank you very much for your patience.”

“Could you please hold while I check that for you?”

“Thank you for calling us today!”

And the Key to using them effectively is Consistently!

Secret #7: Make Every Customer Experience a WIN

How would your customers describe their experiences with your customer service team today?

Would they feel underwhelmed, dissatisfied, satisfied, happy they called, or 'this call was a WIN!'

The goal of all customer service training should be to get their team to consistently deliver the kind of customer service that will keep your customers coming back and recommending your services. Here's how to Create a WIN:

- Be consistently courteous
- Make your customers feel welcomed
- Listen to and respond appropriately to their problem/request
- Present the solution and get their buy in
- Go the extra mile
- Make them feel special at the end of the call

There are no traffic jams along the extra mile. -Roger Staubach

As we mentioned at the beginning of this white paper, great customer service is a culmination of a set of skills that can be learned and measured. It starts with the proper training of these fundamental skills and then coaching their use on a consistent basis. The good news is that once these skills are internalized and become habits, these habits will then take over and the result will be the kind of consistent customer experience our customers expect and deserve.

Professional Bio

Mike Brooks is founder and principle of Mr. Inside Sales, a Los Angeles based inside sales consulting and training firm. Mike has been voted one of the most Influential Inside Sales Professionals two years in a row by The American Association of Inside Sales Professionals, and is the recognized authority in the industry.

Mike is hired by business owners to develop and implement proven sales processes that help them immediately scale and grow Multi-Million Dollar Inside Sales Teams. He also offers customized sales training programs, works as a virtual V.P. of Sales and offers Executive Coaching programs to business owners around the world. For more information, visit his website: www.MrInsideSales.com