

SPECIAL ACTION REPORT



37 Customer Delighting Tips

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Tip 1: Greet your customers promptly and cheerfully.

Time drags when you're waiting to be noticed. Studies have shown that, when a customer is kept waiting, often s/he feels that s/he has waited much longer than the actual time that has passed.

ACTION: Train your staff so that they never leave a customer waiting. If they are busy with another customer, ask them to immediately acknowledge the waiting customer with a nod and the words, "I'll be with you in just a moment ...". Roster on extra staff for those periods when you know there will be heavy traffic in your place of business. Always keep a jar of sweets on hand and ask your staff to encourage customers to enjoy a sweet while they are waiting to get full attention. Make sure all customers are greeted within 10 seconds of entering your premises.

Tip 2: Talk to your customers with your eyes.

Making eye-contact with your customers promptly will tell them a lot about your willingness to serve them. A five- to 10-second glance is all that is needed.

ACTION: Have your staff practice eye-to-eye contact ensuring they only maintain eye contact for an appropriate time.

Tip 3: Smile for your customers.

Volumes have been written on the power of a smile ... because it's true. Think back to a time when you had your spirits lifted by the magnificence of a beautiful smile. Your whole mood changed. You felt good about yourself and about the person who had awoken joy in your heart, simply by a smile.

ACTION: Practice your smiles! Have your staff measure each other's smiles on a scale of one to 10, and then have them discuss how they can be improved, etc.

Tip 4: Breaking the ice.

Often customers like a non-threatening icebreaker. The best icebreaker for a browsing prospect is a general, friendly comment. Not one specifically related to selling them something... leave that until just a bit later! So, start out only with a positive general comment.

ACTION: Have your staff prepare palm cards with a number of various responses on them and have them role-play their techniques with each other after work.

Tip 5: Get the customer doing something.

The best computer and car salespeople are those that actually have their prospects sit down and play with the computer – as soon as possible, or get in the car and go for a drive.

ACTION: Ensure you have fliers, product information sheets and, where appropriate, a place where prospects can "test drive" the product.

Tip 6: Watch your personal appearance and grooming.

First impressions are very important. Staff who present themselves appropriately for their industry will always do better and get more repeat business. What's appropriate for staff in a surf shop would not be appropriate for an undertaker.

ACTION: Ask your staff to dress and present themselves in the same way successful people in similar businesses to yours do.

Tip 7: Check the appearance of your work area.

Is your work area cluttered? If it is, it will convey disorganisation and poor professionalism. Give your work place a "customers' look"...try to see what they see when they come to your place of business. Are things displayed attractively? Is everything clean and tidy? Is the environment inviting? Check, too, for barriers. See if there are ways to get rid of as many barriers as possible. Maybe try getting customers to sit beside your desk rather than in front of it! Maybe try using a small round table, especially when customers need to read the materials you give them.

Look for customer comfort. Are the chairs that your customers use comfortable? Does the environment encourage them to relax? If your customers have to wait, are your waiting areas furnished with reading materials, a TV, a vending machine? If you have a vending area, is this vending area kept clean?

ACTION: Scrutinise your work areas and waiting areas, and organise to have changes made to bring them up to par.

Tip 8: Make the most of phone contacts.

A phone call often provides you with your only contact with a customer or client. Seize this opportunity to use your best phone manner. Here are some pointers:

- State clearly both the name of your business and your name. Don't mumble your business name. If you do, your business name may be lost or forgotten.
- Remember that callers can't read non-verbal signals. So... smile! Callers can "hear" your smile. It works just as it would if you were meeting face-to-face.
- Invite callers to get right to the point with statements such as, "How may I help you?" or, "How may I serve you?"
- Inform callers if you need to seek information from someone else, or from your computer. Say, "I'm looking that up now" or, "I'll have to ask my supervisor."
- Use "hold" only if you absolutely must, and always ask your caller if they mind being put on hold. Then, from time-to-time, break in to tell your caller you haven't forgotten them. If it's going to take too long, tell them you'll call them shortly with the information they need.
- Spell out what you will do and when you will do it.
- Give callers a final chance to ask questions or add information.

ACTION: This is an area where you can profitably have your staff train by role-playing. They will benefit from having you script sample call responses to the most frequently-asked questions. Produce these scripts and hand them out to your staff, then check how well they can use them by observing them role-playing them out.

Tip 9: Say “please” and “thank you”

These are powerful words for building customer rapport and creating customer loyalty. They are easy to say and well worth the effort.

ACTION: Ask your staff to use these magic words. Then a week or so later, observe your staff to make sure they are using them.

Tip 10: Enjoy people and their diversity.

Remind your staff about diversity. Every one of us is different. Have them learn to enjoy people's differences. Ask your staff to work on being non-judgmental and accepting of other people. Have them keep a positive, joyous attitude toward the human race and see how much this changes their interaction for the better with all the different people who come to your place of business.

ACTION: Organise a personal development course for your staff that emphasises training in acceptance and empathy. It will pay big dividends.

Tip 11: Call people by name.

Remember, a person's name is their favourite sound! Remind your staff that most people appreciate it when others make the effort to address them by name. Implement ways that you can have your staff memorise the names of regular customers so they can give a warm, personal greeting whenever they come into your place of business. Start by calling your customer Mr. Smith or Mrs Smith. But wait until they ask you to call them by their first name before you do. In this way you will err on the side of politeness rather than rudeness.

ACTION: Implement ways to capture customers' names and have your staff memorise who is who.

Tip 12: Listen with more than your ears.

Practice: Judging the content of a message, not its delivery. Waiting till your customer has finished talking. Making your customer the centre of your attention. Seeking clarification from your customers until you fully understand their needs. Using open-ended questions, such as, “What kind of lawn mower are you interested in?”

ACTION: Discuss these principles with your staff and have them demonstrate open-ended questions to you.

Tip 13: Anticipate customer needs.

Be sure your customers have everything they need to use the product.

ACTION: Ensure that your staff know that: If customers buy paint, they must also have sandpaper, brushes, thinner, etc. Be sure staff offer help carrying customers' goods to their cars. Make sure staff respond to customers' urgency. When your customers are in a hurry, train staff to try to work quickly to accommodate them. If your customers ever experience confusion or difficulty - in, say, filling out a form - ensure your staff are trained to come to their aid immediately. Your customers will remember all these kindnesses.

Tip 14: Reach out and touch your customers.

Shake hands, and place change in customers' hands rather than on the counter.

ACTION: Train your staff to use touch, but discuss and demonstrate what is appropriate and what is not.

Tip 15: Compliment freely and sincerely.

Compliments that are sincere create buckets of goodwill.

ACTION: Have your staff practice making sincere compliments. Best things to compliment are customers' clothes, children, behaviour, or something they own.

Tip 16: Fish for feedback.

Listen carefully to customer complaints. Complaints can allow you to take the short road to putting things right.

ACTION: Train your staff to listen for feedback on the way you are doing things and to keep a record of all complaints. Discuss and solve the issues of all staff complaints at weekly staff meetings.

Tip 17: Watch your timing.

Keep all promises. Follow up to see that your customers are satisfied.

ACTION: Don't just do this occasionally. Train your staff to schedule regular times for follow up. Ensure that all commitments made are logged, and then check that they have been followed up – on time.

Tip 18: Explain how things work.

You will delight your customers if you take the time to show them, in detail, just how the product they have bought works. You should give them a short tour through the owner's manual with explanations and hands-on demonstrations. Customers love this sort of treatment, because it takes the headache out of working out how to use it themselves.

ACTION: Make product-use demonstrations a part of your ongoing customer service program. Show customers how to use a product or service so that they are confident with every aspect of the product.

Tip 19: Reinforce their decision to do business with you.

There is a buyer's remorse that can sometimes set in very quickly after a purchase, particularly a large purchase. So, it's important to always reassure customers that they have made a great buying decision. Do this by making statements such as, "I'm sure you're going to get many fantastic hours of enjoyment out of this", etc.

ACTION: Get your staff to list all the "feel good" statements they can come up with about each of your goods and services that would be appropriate after-purchase comments aimed at reassuring buyers that they have made a great buying decision.

Tip 20: Underpromise, overdeliver.

Constantly look for ways you can give your customers a little more than they expect. Things like fast tracking the delivery of their goods, offering to deliver the goods personally, if appropriate, and helping them with handling the transaction. For example, fill in all parts of the forms that have to be filled in for them, making them do the absolute minimum of this sort of drudgery. Remove their old product free-of-charge, or take it as a trade-in, etc.

ACTION: Put in place facilities to delight your customers. Have your staff use their imagination to come up with ways that you can exceed your customers' expectations. This is your single most successful way to build customer loyalty.

Tip 21: Master recovery skills.

You and your staff need to realise that upset customers want to: ... Be listened to... Have their problems understood and their distress relieved... Be compensated for their losses... Be reassured that their problems will be handled quickly... Be assured that they will not have to suffer further inconvenience... Be treated with respect.. Be understood when they complain that a problem has occurred... Be assured that the problem won't happen again.

ACTION: Train staff not to take anything in this arena personally. Train them to do everything possible to satisfy the customer, then let the matter go... having learnt from the experience. Take time every week or every fortnight, in a staff meeting, to discuss incidents where customers were unhappy, and put in place procedures for handling these sorts of situations in the future. Empower your staff to make decisions in regard to refunds and "make-good" situations. Allow them to make the decision in terms of preset guidelines.

Tip 22: Identify and cope with the chronic complainer.

ACTION: Explain to staff how to treat chronic complainers. When they have exhausted all the means possible to deal with a chronic complainer, tell them how to politely just "walk away." You must "make-good" real complaints by genuine customers, but chronic complainers are best advised to "shop elsewhere!" The stress they can cause you and your staff is just not worth it.

Tip 23: Tell how you fixed it.

Tell your customers, and other customers, too, when you solve a problem. It's good PR and you're allowed to crow about it a bit.

ACTION: Have your staff make follow-up calls to customers who have had a problem to be resolved (even if you are sure the problem has been fixed) to remind customers that you do care!

Tip 24: Compensate with E-plus.

Give something EXTRA when there has been a problem that you have fixed.

ACTION: Suggestions: Give a gift, offer to pick up and deliver goods, reimburse for costs, acknowledge customers' inconvenience, and thank them for coming back.

Tip 25: Make sure you keep that edge.

It's ideal for you and your staff to take short breaks from customer-contact during the course of each day.

ACTION: Try to give your customer-contact staff some “breathing” time each day so that they can catch up on paperwork, or do some other task. This will allow them to recharge their batteries for the demanding task of face-to-face contact with customers.

Tip 26: Make sure your staff feel free to ask for the tools they need.

ACTION: Make sure you have sufficient telephones, computers and fax machines to handle the volume of work your staff are creating. Have letterhead paper, envelopes, and other stationery all in stock. Make sure they all have business cards, regularly updated product information sheets, policy and procedure statements, a writing table, office supplies, and a mobile or portable phone. Make them feel that your commitment to supporting them in customer service is a real priority.

Tip 27: Look for recruits who will help you get the job done.

ACTION: Ask your staff to look for other people who they could recommend to you as “naturals” for customer service work. Great staff, with top people skills, can be taught your business, even if they work in a totally different industry. It is easier to teach product and service knowledge than to teach “people skills.” Remember, the specifics of your business can be taught, great attitudes cannot.

Tip 28: Take the long view.

Losing a customer will not normally impact on your business immediately, but it will impact in the long term. A few dollars profit per week will amount to thousands of dollars lost over a period of years. And, more importantly, one lost customer who is unhappy will “bitch” about you to an average of 11 other people, many of whom maybe potential or existing customers. So, the effect of one customer lost is multiplied on a number of fronts.

ACTION: Implement customer service programs for the long term. They take time to impact, and influence the growth of your business. Like the shampoo ad, making claims about it renewing the gloss of your hair, says, “It won’t happen overnight, but it will happen...”. So, customer service programs, if stuck to, will dramatically impact on the growth of your business ... over time.

Tip 29: Be an explorer and discover better ideas.

ACTION: Set up an “explorer” group when you hear of a good customer service idea, or other idea, to investigate it and report back to you on its value to your business. You can even set up an explorer group made up of customers who want to help you provide them with better service. Let them tell you what they want. Keep on the alert for better ways to get the job done.

Tip 30: Create user groups.

Some stores, dealing in areas such as computers, set up user groups with a place to meet, and these groups share ideas about uses for their computers. Another example is a cosmetic shop holding periodic classes or seminars, etc. These activities go a long way to getting ongoing repeat business.

ACTION: Decide if this idea can be used in your business. If it can, implement it! Have customer-service staff attend with the intention of listening to what customers want, and the ways that they use your products /services. After each session, list ideas that have emerged to help you provide better service, stock additions, and help you understand your customer’s needs more fully.

Tip 31: Correspond regularly.

Keep in touch with your customers. Send them “thank you” notes, information sheets/newsletters, etc.

Don't always try to sell them something. Sure... send out marketing material occasionally, but delight them with service by writing to them as a helpful friend from time-to-time.

ACTION: Create a database of your customers and use it. Collect, phone, fax, e-mail and snail mail information. If you are not doing this, start immediately and you could double your sales in just one year!

Tip 32: Ask often: "How are we doing?"

ACTION: Ask this often, and be receptive to customer comments and suggestions. Have the courage to accept justified criticism and act upon it.

Tip 33: Make them feel special.

Customers like to feel important. Make them feel particularly special and they'll come back time-and-time again.

ACTION: Train your staff to call customers by name, to listen to their needs, wants and criticisms. Ask your staff to learn their names, get to know them, and treat them as guests you care about.

Tip 34: Explain features and benefits.

You make a sale by "selling" customers on benefits, outcomes and results. These are all more powerful persuaders than features.

ACTION: List all the benefits/outcomes/results of buying your product or services, and make sure all your staff commit them to memory.

Tip 35: Go for add-on sales.

Remember McDonalds' question, "Will there be fries or coke with that?" Add-ons are actually a customer service, because you are anticipating customer needs and offering something they can have to fully meet their needs.

ACTION: Make lists of add-ons for every product or service you sell, and ensure your staff commit these lists to memory. Train them in how to suggest add-ons to customers who are making purchases of various items.

Tip 36: Stay close after the sale.

Customers hate a "love-'em and leave-'em" relationship. Don't let your customers go back to feeling like a stranger after the sale has been made.

ACTION: Make sure procedures are in place for ongoing customer contact. Make customers part of your business "family" by sending them clippings of interest, birthday cards, invitations to special events at your business, and "thank you" notes for referrals.

Tip 37: Ask for referrals.

This is so important, but far too often neglected.

ACTION: Train your staff to ask customers for referrals of others who may be interested in the same products or services. Get names and addresses of your customers' friends and associates, and simply send them an invitation to visit your premises. Most people appreciate a personal invitation, and you'll see your customer base grow quickly.