

## Ten Customer Service Secrets to Win Back Customers

by Ed Sykes

Recently I was facilitating an Outstanding Customer Service program and broke for lunch. Knowing that the restaurants in the area had much to desire as far as service I gave the students an extra fifteen minutes for lunch.

Sure enough a group of four students came rushing into the classroom with their lunches in hand. They sincerely apologized and quickly explained that they receive poor service at a restaurant (This restaurant is part of a national chain. Hint: its name references a day in the week. I can't give you the complete answer.) They went on to explain that after the waiter initially took their order, they waited 45 minutes before their food finally arrived. During the wait, no one came to check on them.

They went on to explain the food finally came and it was time to leave for class. They were not happy. They asked to see the restaurant manager. The manager sheepishly came to see them and asked, "What was the problem?" One of my students explained the situation to which the restaurant manager replied, "The food ticket only shows you were waiting for eleven minutes." My students were not happy and expressed it to which the manager asked them, "Would you like dessert?" My students again expressed they were not happy. Each time my students expressed their unhappiness, the manager would say she was sorry. My students weren't buying it. The manager then left without explaining where and what she was doing. The manager returned and told my students that their meals were free. Even though the manager gave them free meals my students said they will never go back to that restaurant or any other restaurant in that chain.

So why weren't these customers happy? The restaurant had an opportunity to turn a difficult customer service experience into a winning situation for all and squandered it. Not only will these patrons, my students, never go back to any restaurant in that chain but how many other people will they tell about their unhappy experience? The unhappy customer, on average, will tell 27 other people about their experience. With the use of the Internet, whether web pages or e-mail, that number can increase in the thousands, if not millions with the click of a button. However, according to the Department of Consumer Affairs, 82-95% of unhappy customers will come back if impressed and actually refer five new customers.

Let's take a look at the ten secrets that will not only win back your customer in any situation, but have them referring new customers, but will add more money to your bottom line revenue.

### 1. Smile

Nothing can turn a hostile situation into position moment faster than a sincere smile. A smile that says, "I want to help you in a positive way." It communicates you are positive about the interaction with the customer. A sincere smile enhances the communication process so that you can find the solution faster.

### 2. Introduce Yourself as the Solution Creator

Make sure you introduce yourself, find out the customer's name, and let your customer know your position and why you are there. This lets the

customer know you are taking responsibility to creating a solution for them. You might say something like: "Hello, my name is Mike. I am the manager at this location. I am here to assist you in this situation, please tell me about it."

Notice I didn't say, "What's the problem?" By using "What's the problem?" you start the customer service situation in a negative note. The customer is thinking "You're the problem," "This establishment is the problem," "The whole world is the problem," etc. By starting your conversation with "I am here to assist you in this situation, please tell me about it" you are setting up a "verbal agreement" in the customer's mind to move to a solution. Note: If possible, please use the customer's name throughout the conversation.

### 3. Listen

Customers want tell their side of the story and feel like they are only heard but you listened to them. Mentally take a step back and dedicate yourself to actively listening to the customer's story with an open mind so that you can find a solution. In the above situation, the manager stood silently while my students were explaining their story. Be active in your listening and create empathy ("put yourself in the customer's shoes") with statements such as:

"I can appreciate what you're saying."

"I can understand how you'd feel that way."

"I can see how you'd be upset."

"It sounds as if we've caused you inconvenience."

"What I understand the situation to be..."

Please stay away communication that alienates the customer such as:

"I don't know why you are so upset."

"That's the first complaint we ever got on that."

"I know how you feel." (Because you don't)

"Boy, you're sure mad."

In the above story, the students told the manager that they weren't happy with the service because they didn't have time to eat their meals. The manager, not listening, said, "Would you like dessert?" The solution was not more food. Listen for the solution!

### 4. Be Sorry for the Right Reasons

Be sincere in your concern for the customer and say sorry the correct way. Many time in the heat of the customer service situation we what to show some sign of concern so we do the following:

- The first words of the interaction with the words, "I'm sorry." First, you didn't find out any information from the customer to be sorry.

- Say sorry throughout the conversation with saying what you are sorry for. When saying you are sorry, say exactly what you are sorry for.

The students, even though the manager kept repeating she was sorry, didn't think the manager was sincere in her apology. The correct say to say you are sorry is:

"I'm sorry you had to wait so long for your food."

"I'm sorry that you were treated that way."

"I'm sorry that our employee said that to you."

"I'm sorry this situation happened to you."

Let the customer know exactly why you are sorry. The students thought the manager's "sorries" were insincere because she never mentioned why she was sorry.

### 5. Give Your Personal Assurance

Let the customer know you will personally create a solution for them. It could be as simple as saying, "I'm taking personal responsibility for this."

### 6. Ask Them What They Want

One of the fears that we have when trying to satisfy the customer is that we think they want something out of our reach. Ask the customer, "What would you like you to do?" or "What would make this situation right for you?" You will be surprised that in most cases the customer will ask for less you were willing to give.

### 7. Use Statements of Conviction

Sure the following to gain the confidence of the customer:

"We're going to do something about that!"

"We will make a change right now!"

### 8. Present a Clear Plan of Action

Make sure the customer knows what you are going to do to correct the situation for them. 95% of making things right for the customer is making them aware that you are taking action to make a difference for them. Explain to them the actions and timelines you need to take to make things right for them. If you need to leave or make a telephone call to obtain additional information, say:

"Please excuse me while I make a telephone call obtain the best solution for you. This will take five minutes, can you please wait?"

"Excuse me, I need to ask the person with the missing piece of information so that we can quick resolve this for you. Do you mind waiting five minutes?"

Note: Make sure you get back to the time customer before the time you specified. If you promised ten minutes, get back to the customer before ten minutes. Rule of thumb, double the time it would normally that to get the information. If you know it will take ten minutes to get the answer for the customer then tell the customer you will get back to them within twenty minutes.

### 9. Move Quickly to the Solution

If you applied steps 1-8 you are ready to give the customer the solution they wanted for a win-win situation. You can confirm this by saying the following:

"Would this be agreeable for you?"

"Is this the solution you were looking for?"

"Will this make things right for you?"

### 10. Ask for the Business

If you did everything right this is the perfect time to ask the customer to come back and do business with your organization. You showed that you were professional, caring, sincerely, positive, and proactive. Why wouldn't they do business with you again?

Some of the way you can say this is:

"We would appreciate the opportunity to serve you in the future."

"Please come back and I will personally guarantee you receive outstanding service."

"Here is a 20% coupon. Please use it on your next visit to our establishment."

It's important that you let the customer know that you appreciate their business and want them to come back. Remember, if you did everything right, not only will them come back but they will other people to do business with you. Use challenging customer service situations to build your business.

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