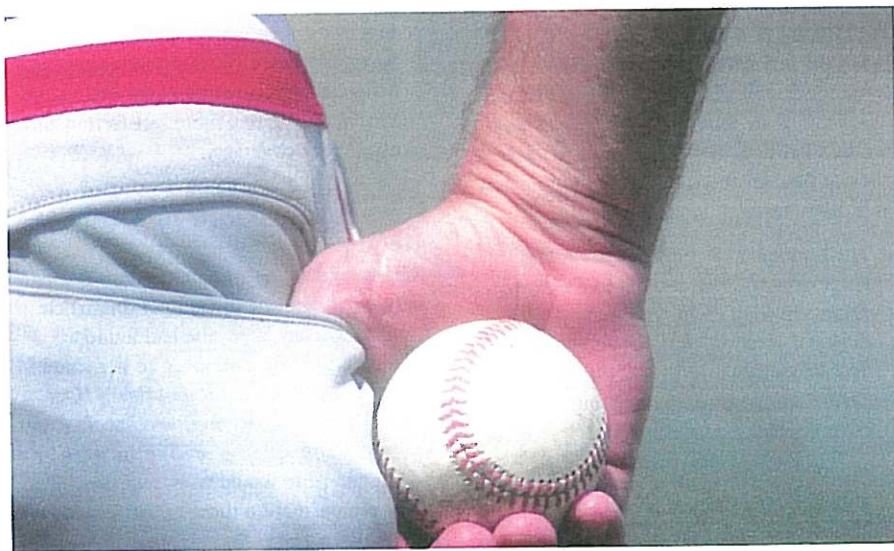


The 12 Things Customers really Want!

This is the first in a series of articles on The Art of Giving Quality Service, designed to be shared with your frontline people. In this opening article, Mary Gober helps your service givers get inside their customers' heads.



Basic No 1: Control

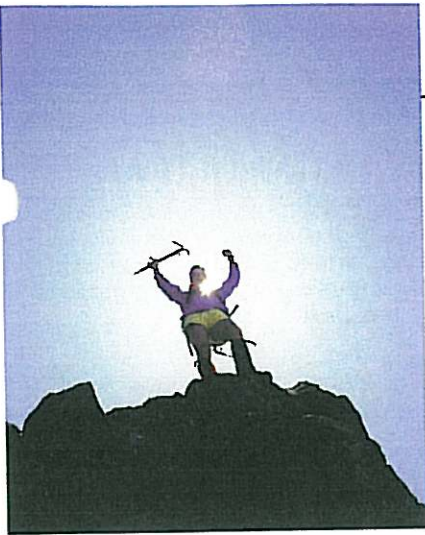
Why do customers do the things they do? What turns them on? What turns them off? Why are they sometimes happy? Why are they sometimes angry? What do customers want in a service transaction? The answers to these questions are not easy. Psychologists have been working on them for years. But as a service-giver, your success depends on handling people properly. You need to know the twelve basic needs that motivate customers and make them do the things they do.

1 Control.

Customers need to feel they are in control of the situation. They need to feel they can

make things come out their way and are not being taken advantage of, manipulated or deceived.

Sandy Dempsey was planning her holiday and was trying to select a package tour with her travel agent. The agent didn't seem to be giving Sandy all the alternatives available to help her make a good decision. Sandy felt as though she was being manipulated and steered toward the tour the travel agent wanted her to have, rather than being allowed to make her own choice. This made her feel very uncomfortable. She decided to take her business elsewhere and left the travel agency.



Basic No 2: Goals

2 Goals.

Customers need to feel that whatever they are doing is helping them move towards their goals. Most of the things we do in life are in the pursuit of some goal. We are constantly seeking those things that are important to us, things we feel will bring us happiness and satisfaction.

Michael and Linda were a young couple trying to furnish their new house. They were buying expensive furniture because they wanted to establish a nice home that reflected their taste. They appreciated reassurance that the furniture they were buying would help them meet that goal.

3 Self-image.

Customers like to feel good about themselves as they go about their daily lives. They like to think of themselves as doing the right thing, that they are intelligent and competent, not foolish or silly. They like to interact with those who help them maintain their positive images of themselves.

Bob Wilson was a plumber repairing the hot water heating system in the Wellington's home. After this was finished, he explained the proper operation of the system to avoid

future maintenance problems. He reassured the Wellingtons they themselves could make minor adjustments and do a minor maintenance on the system if they wanted to. He avoided making them feel foolish or guilty about neglecting the system. They enjoyed Bob's visit and assured him they would call him in the future if they needed repair services again.

4 Fairness.

One of a customer's strongest drives involves a sense of fairness. They like to feel that in any service transaction, they are being treated fairly and appropriately when compared to others.

Michele Ward was a businesswoman travelling alone. In her hotel dining room she was seated and left waiting. She noticed others who came in after she did were waited on promptly. She was very angry about what she considered unfair treatment and complained to the head waiter.

5 Friendliness.

Customers want to feel good about those with whom they interact. They want to trust them and have confidence in them. They like service-givers to be friendly and warm so they, as customers, can enjoy a pleasant transaction.

Joanne Simpson was a bank teller. She never smiled, never looked at her customers and never used their names. She was always businesslike, but cold and impersonal. Customers waiting in line tried to avoid her window. They preferred to do business with the other tellers who greeted them by name, smiled and made the transaction pleasant and enjoyable.

6 Understanding.

Customers always want to know WHAT is happening and why, so they can understand what's going on around them. In service-giving situations they get frustrated and angry

when they are unable to get the information they want. They don't like it when things are not explained to them so they can really understand what's going on.

Wendy Johnson took her car in for servicing after she heard strange noises in the engine. The mechanic used a lot of technical terms and confused her with his explanations. She left the car, but felt miserable and afraid the repairs would be too costly because she didn't really understand what was going to be done or why.



Basic No 7: Security

7 Security.

Customers have a strong need to feel safe and secure. They like predictable situations where they are familiar with everything and know what's going to happen. That's why they often hesitate to change services or products. In service situations they get apprehensive when they think their safety or security is threatened.

Tom Tracy took his family to a new theme park that had just opened up. But as soon as he got there, he felt uneasy. Things were so noisy and confused he couldn't figure out where to go or what to do. The rides didn't look as though they were safe and everything was dirty and messy. He decided to leave because he didn't feel this was a place he and his family could enjoy.

8 Approval and Recognition.

Customers like to have the approval and acceptance of others. Praise and recognition by others is one of their most powerful motivators. From our first efforts as babies to gain the approval of our parents, we all spend a lot of time trying to get others to recognise us for our accomplishments.

When *Harry Dunbar* was given the Rotarian-of-the-Year Award by his organisation, he was pleased and proud. That night, to his surprise, he found a congratulatory fruit basket in his room from the hotel management where the award banquet had been held. He felt proud and pleased that the hotel had taken the time to acknowledge his accomplishment and made a mental note to use the hotel in the future for his company's meetings.

9 Importance

All customers like to feel they are important



Basic No 4: Fairness

and essential. In service-giving situations, they want service-givers to recognise their importance and not ignore them or treat them as unimportant. They like prompt, full attention and have to have the proper consideration given to their time and activities.

Ruby Mason was a manager in a small company. She arrived at her doctor's office at her appointed time, 2.00p.m. At 3.30 p.m. she still hadn't seen the doctor, and the nurse failed to keep her informed of any reason for the delay. Ruby left feeling insulted and frustrated and resolved to change doctors since this had happened before.



Basic No 10: Appreciation

10 Appreciation. Customers like to feel appreciated. Especially if they invest a large amount of time, energy or money in something. They want that effort to be appreciated by those who benefit from it. In dealing with organisations they patronise, customers like to know their business is valued and appreciated, especially if they are regular customers.

Rick Manner was a hard-working manufacturer's representative. Three times a month he travelled on the same airline to make calls in different cities across Europe. He saw the same airline desk personnel on almost all his trips, even the same flight attendants. None of the airline service-givers ever told him they appreciated his business, even though he spent thousands of pounds each month with that airline.

11 Belonging. Customers like to identify with organisations. They belong to clubs, neighbourhood groups and volunteer organisations. They like to feel they contribute to others, and that others contribute to them as members of the same group. They enjoy being identified as people who belong to a group. In service-giving situations, customers are often proud of their affiliation with an organisation. They like the feeling of being a regular customer and 'belonging' to that organisation. Service-givers who recognise regular customers, greet them by name and acknowledge their affiliation, help their customers satisfy that sense of belonging.

Fred and Alice Caruthers and **Joe and Jackie Taylor** had been taking their holiday together at the same resort for nearly 15 years. They were always greeted warmly by the owners and given special attention. When the owners introduced new staff members to the Taylors and Caruthers, they were always told, "Take good care of these people, they're part of the family here!"

12 Honesty

Customers have a strong need to feel they can trust and have confidence in service-givers and their organisations. This is especially true today because so many customers have been the victims of false advertising, broken promises and poor service.



Bob Andrews was a manufacturing plant manager. His plant was having all kinds of problems with a piece of equipment they had recently purchased from Ajax Ltd. When he called Ajax's service department, one of their field representatives advised him that the problem must be Bob's own maintenance procedures as the Ajax equipment had no problems of this kind before. Later, Bob happened to be at a trade show and met several other manufacturing people who told him they had similar problems with their Ajax equipment. This kind of dishonesty made Bob angry, and he decided that he wouldn't buy anything else from Ajax again.

Determining Customer's Needs.

These 12 needs apply to customers in general. To really use this information to good advantage, you need to be able to determine which needs are most important to a particular customer in a given situation. There are techniques you can use to do this.

Ask Questions.

By asking your customers, you can help determine what their primary needs are at the time you are working with them.

LEARNING POINTS

Your success as a service-giver depends on how well you handle customers. Understanding what your customers need and want is essential to quality service-giving. Customers in general have 12 basic needs:

① Control	② Goals
③ Self-Image	④ Fairness
⑤ Friendliness	⑥ Understanding
⑦ Security	⑧ Approval and Recognition
⑨ Importance	⑩ Appreciation
⑪ Belonging	⑫ Honesty

To determine the particular needs of an individual customer in a given situation, you need to:

- ▶ Ask Questions
- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Observe

Listen.

By listening carefully to what your customers say and how they say it, you can also help determine what their needs are. And don't just listen to the words, try to listen for the feelings behind the words. Pay close attention to what they are telling you, what they ask about, what they comment on. Use these clues to zero in on the need they seem to be trying to satisfy.

Observe.

Watch how your customers are acting. Pay particular attention to their facial expressions and posture. Notice what they might be carrying, how they are dressed, who they have with them, etc. By being alert and observing your customers you can sometimes pick up valuable clues that will help you determine their needs.

Keep in mind that quality service-givers ask themselves, "What does this customer seem to need and want from me? Can I satisfy that need as I take care of them?" By thinking this way, you can improve the service you give your customers and make the transaction a more satisfying one for both of you.



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THE ART OF GIVING QUALITY SERVICE: PART TWO OF A GUIDE TO BETTER SERVICE DELIVERY, TO SHARE WITH YOUR FRONTLINE.

What makes for a Quality Service Giver?



This is the second in a series of articles on The Art of Giving Quality Service, designed to be shared with your frontline people. In this article, Mary Gober identifies what sets quality service-givers apart in their dealings with customers.

As a service-giver, or the manager of service-givers, you can use the following characteristics, which are the result of my observations of superior customer service people in action, as a checklist. How do you measure up? Chances are you'll find at least a few areas where you feel you could improve.

A. Attitudes Toward Customers

1. Enjoy Helping People

This is what service-giving is really all about, helping people meet their needs and solve their problems. They see problems as opportunities for being of service to others. Customers quickly respond to this type of service-giver since it is easy for them to recognise such service-givers as ready, able and eager to serve them.

2. Handle People Well

In addition to knowing the technical parts of their job well, quality service-givers also know how to handle people. They consider this part of their job just as important as the technical side, and maybe even more so. They understand that sometimes customers are just as much interested in HOW things were done for them, as they are in WHAT was done. That's why quality service-givers are empathetic. They are sensitive to the needs and wants of other people and know how to handle people in a wide variety of situations.

3. Care for Their Customers

Watching out for their customers' safety and welfare is one of the things effective service-givers do best. They make sure the areas where

customers are going to visit are clean, safe and comfortable. And they keep an eye out for ANYTHING that will make it more convenient for their customers to do business with them. Good service-givers make sure every part of the service transaction is set up not just for the organisation's convenience, but for the customer's convenience, as well.

4. Give Fair and Equal Treatment to All

Quality service-givers give the same attention, care and concern to all of their customers regardless of age, race, religion or ethnic background. They make sure everyone they deal with is treated fairly.

5. Never Use Their Job Authority to "Punish" People

Service-givers, often frustrated and under stress, may sometimes be tempted to use their job authority to "punish" those who have been giving them a hard time. Quality service-givers never do this. They realise they may have certain power to make life miserable for customers, to make them wait, to make them come back the next day at great inconvenience, etc. But effective service-givers resist that temptation, they play it straight and take no pleasure in "getting even."

B. Skills in Dealing with Customers

1. Know the Technical Parts of Their Job

Every job requires certain technical knowledge and skills. Good service-givers know their job. They are competent and able to do all parts of their job, and do them well. They pride themselves on their effectiveness and their

efficiency in knowing what to do, when and how. And if they are given new things to learn, they learn them quickly so as to maintain their high standards of efficiency.

2. Follow a Consistent Method for Giving Service

Later in this series of articles you'll find the 7-Step Method of giving good service. Most quality service-givers follow these seven steps in every transaction. They realise that by using this method they can continue to offer their customers quality service, day in and day out, not just once in a while. Using the method gives them confidence to handle any service transaction.

3. Reassure People About Their Service

Most customers have had bad service experiences. In some cases they may approach a service-giver with a chip on their shoulder, expecting to be badly treated and ready to fight. That's why quality service-givers take time to reassure their customers they are going to be given the best possible service. This frequently helps avoid misunderstandings or problems before they arise.

4. Communicate Effectively

All quality service transactions are based on good communications: listening, talking, writing or reading. Quality service-givers how to read carefully and accurately, write clearly and use good handwriting or keyboard skills. They are able to make themselves understood by speaking clearly, loudly enough and slowly enough, and using language and terminology that customers can easily understand.

Quality service-givers also listen well. They understand communicating, though it seems simple, is full of possible misunderstandings that can be harmful to all concerned. So, they are always careful to communicate effectively, whether listening, talking, writing or reading.

5. Refer People When Necessary

When they are unable to help their clients or customers, effective service-givers know where to send people for help. They know other people in their organisation who might be able to help, or in some cases, they refer their customers to other organisations that might help them. But they do this only when they are quite sure they are unable to give their customers what they want.

6. Always Use Courtesy

One of the most distinguishing features of quality service-givers is they are always friendly and polite to their customers. They use courtesy words and phrases and demonstrate courteous behaviour. They continue to be polite and friendly even in a tough situation where they have to deal with an irate customer.

Quality service-givers are also courteous to their fellow employees, realising courtesy is contagious. They understand an important part of good human relations: most people, when they see others being polite and friendly, tend to act the same way themselves.

7. Are Neat, Clean and Well-Organised

Quality service-givers can be identified by just looking at them. They keep themselves neat and clean and always look sharp. They keep their clothing or uniforms clean and neat as well, and are always dressed appropriately for the job. Their concern with cleanliness and neatness extends to their workplace, and they make sure the areas where they work are clean, neat and well-organised. They follow the rule, "A place for everything, and everything in its place."

8. Use the Telephone Effectively

Because more and more service is being handled by phone, quality service-givers have developed their telephone skills. They know the special problems of communicating by telephone and how to handle them. They also know the ins and outs of telephone management and the proper way of taking and leaving messages.

9. Use Their Time Well

Knowing how much time to take is a critical skill that effective service-givers have developed. They know customers don't want to be dealt with too quickly. But they also know customers don't want to waste time and be delayed unnecessarily. Taking the right amount of time to help and responding quickly to customers are the two important skills here.

10. Help Educate Customers

Effective service-givers realise they can help themselves by helping educate their customers.

This can mean a simple explanation of a form, or procedure so the next time the customer's transaction is speeded up or made easier. Or it can mean watching for what customers do that is correct and helpful in the service transaction, and then commenting on that, reinforcing or rewarding the customer for having the right forms ready, or providing the right information ahead of time, etc. This makes the service transaction easier for all concerned.

C. Preventing Customer Dissatisfaction

1. Anticipate Customer Needs

Because of their experience on the job, quality service-givers often can anticipate what customers need, sometimes even before the customers are aware of those needs themselves. Effective service-givers anticipate these needs and are quick to offer customers help beyond what they ask for.

2. Take the Initiative in Solving Problems

Effective service-givers don't always wait for customers to bring in their problems. If they know the customer might be having a problem with their product or service, they contact the customer right away to let them know about it. They try to solve the problem as best they can, and if they are unable to, they take the initiative in helping the customer find a solution to the problem. They never say, "Sorry, that's not our problem," even when the problem isn't their fault. They act responsibly by trying to help customers get their problems solved, no matter whose fault the problem was.

3. Do the Job Carefully the First Time

Quality service-givers try to minimise errors and the time-consuming, costly need to do something over or correct a mistake. They are fast and efficient, but take time to check carefully to see that the work is done correctly the first time.

4. Keep Their Promises

Honesty and integrity are important to quality service-givers. That's why they never make promises they are unable to keep. And they always keep the promises they do make. Many customers are given easy promises in order to make them feel good, get rid of them, etc. Later, when these promises are not kept, they get angry, distrustful and lose faith in the

service-giver and the organisation. Quality service-givers know this and work hard to maintain their reputation for honesty and integrity.

5. Keep Customers Informed

One of the skills that quality service-givers develop quickly is that of keeping customers informed about what is happening. A good service-giver never leaves the customer wondering what's going on now? What's happening? What comes next? Good service-givers tell their customers what they are doing and why, and what they can expect will happen next. This helps make the service transaction pleasant and anxiety-free for the customer.

D. Coping With Customer Problems

1. Stay Cool in a Crisis

One of the most remarkable traits of quality service-givers is their ability to stay cool, calm and collected in a crisis. That's one of their outstanding features. They realise even when everything is in an uproar, it doesn't do much good to panic. They know they are unable to give their best efforts if they are screaming and shouting or fussing and fuming. Effective service-givers have come to learn if they hang in there in a crisis situation, and stay cool, others around them tend to settle down a bit. Then things seem to go a lot easier for everyone.

2. Take a Positive Approach to Complaints

Complaints are opportunities for organisation to improve their service. With that understanding, good service-givers see complaints as normal, useful parts of any service-giving activity. They handle complaints quickly and effectively and are not afraid of them or try to avoid them. Of course, quality service-givers are never happy to see their customers complain because it may mean a breakdown in the service that was given. But when there are complaints, they take a positive, helpful, problem-solving approach. They handle them in such a way that customers who are satisfied with the way the complaint was handled, often become even better customers because of it.

So how did you do compared with these characteristics? Next issue we'll look at the Gober 10 Step Method for Handling Complaints.



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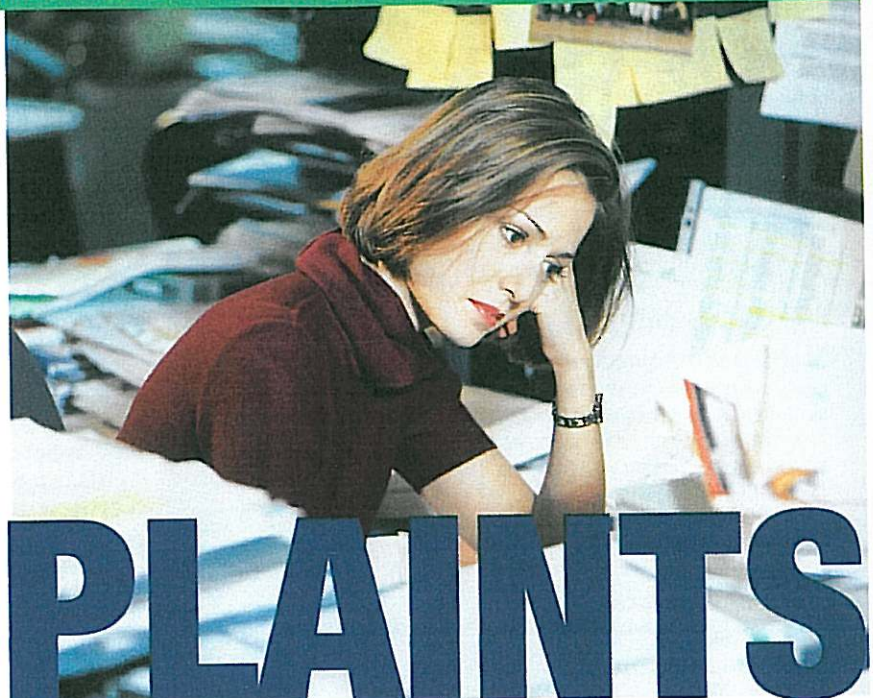
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Increasing your confidence with



COMPLAINTS

In the third part of a series designed for you to share with your front-line staff, Mary Gober explains another aspect of The 'GOBER METHOD' for delivering superior service. In this edition we present to you a perfect routine for dealing with angry customers

Do you appreciate the value of complaints? You should. Every service organisation recognises their worth. A complaint is real gold ... treasure it! Complaints provide vital information on where things are going wrong, allowing you to retain customers who may have taken their business elsewhere.

Research shows approximately 90 per cent of customers who have a problem and don't complain stop doing business with that organisation. The 10-Step Method outlined below will help you in effective complaint handling and let you manage customer complaints with confidence and consistency.

Step 1 - Listen without Interrupting

Regardless of how hostile, abusive and upset the customer might be, you must listen fully to the complaint without interrupting. All vital information should be written down. Listening without interrupting will also help diffuse the customer's emotions. Toward the end of the customer's statements, questions to help clarify information, if necessary, are okay. But don't argue or deny anything the customer is saying, just listen.

Step 2 - Don't get Defensive

Customers may not have all the proper information. They may get abusive. They

may exaggerate. They may use a loud, threatening voice. Regardless of this, you must avoid getting defensive and starting an argument. It helps to remember although you may not be able to do much about your customer's improper behaviour, you can understand their being upset and control your own behaviour by not fighting back. If the customer's tirade goes on too long, you can ask: "May I summarise what I understand to be the problem, and then we can try to solve it?" The customer may want to continue the tirade. But if they haven't been answered with defensive, aggressive words or phrases, the chances are pretty good that they are ready to settle down and listen.

Step 3- Respond with GLAD - SURE - SORRY

Next, you can use statements like: "I'm glad you're bringing it to my attention so I can help you. I'm sure we can work this out to your satisfaction. I'm sorry there is a problem." You need to be careful you don't immediately accept liability for the problem and say something like: "I'm sorry we have made a mistake." Until all the facts have been gathered, you are better off to express empathy and acknowledge the existence of the problem. Later, if the problem is your mistake, you can make an apology to the customer.

Step 4 - Express Empathy

Next, show you understand the customer's feelings and say something like: "That must have been frustrating for you. I can understand how you might get angry and upset in that kind of situation." This helps to calm the customer further. Once customers realise someone can appreciate their problem and their feelings in the matter, they are much more willing to participate calmly at working on a solution to the problem.

Step 5 - Ask Questions to Understand the Problem

Once the customer has calmed down, you may discover the information they now give you may be slightly different from what they gave before. This is because the emotions involved at first may have caused them to distort or exaggerate the facts. So you need to summarise what information you have obtained so far. Then, ask questions to get more information. Then, confirm this information with your customer. Get agreement with them on exactly what the problem is. Once this step is complete, and only then, should you go onto the next step.

Step 6 - Find Out What the Customer Wants

What the customer wants may be

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obvious. If so, repeat it and ask the customer to confirm your understanding. Go the extra mile and ask, "Is there anything else you would like us to do?"

If the customer's request is not specific, ask the customer what they want you to do, or what they want to have happen regarding their complaint. In some cases, the customer may be satisfied with just "letting the organisation know" what happened. Having someone listen and empathise may be all they wanted. If this is so, simply express your appreciation to your customer for telling you of their complaint.

If the customer wants something specific done, find out exactly what it is they want. Confirm this with them to be sure you understand what it is they want.

Step 7 - Explain What You CAN DO

Next, explain to the customer what you can do. If what the customer wants done is something you can do, take action right away. If what the customer wants done is something you cannot or are unable to do, then you need to go on to the next step.

Step 8 - Discuss Alternatives and Agree On Action

You should fully discuss the alternative courses of action that might be taken over the customer's complaint and request for action. Present this in terms of benefits or drawbacks for the customer for each alternative. For instance, one alternative might be less costly to the customer, but might take more time.

If none of the alternatives are satisfactory to the customer, and if you are really unable to do any more for them, then get a person of higher responsibility and authority in your organisation involved. There are 5 important steps to take when getting another person involved. You will find them at the end of this article!

Once the alternatives have been fully discussed, you and your customer need to agree on a course of action. Be as specific as possible. Be sure the customer knows who will do what and by when, where and how. This helps give the customer confidence that something will really be done, and you are not just giving them the brush-off.

Step 9 - Take Action IMMEDIATELY

Once something has been agreed upon, you must take action immediately and implement the agreed upon solution. If there are any delays or deviations from

the course of action agreed on, notify your customer immediately and negotiate a new plan of action. Remember, act immediately and keep your promises to the customer.

Step 10 - Follow Up to Ensure Customer Satisfaction

After the complaint has been resolved, follow up and contact the customer to make sure the solution to the problem was satisfactory to them. You should also take this opportunity to thank the customer for their continued business. Express your appreciation for their complaint and the opportunity it gave your organisation to correct the situation. You can also say something like: "We have identified the cause(s) of the problem and are taking action to correct it. In the future, if you are not completely satisfied with our service, will you please let me know personally?"

Remember, in handling complaints and potentially explosive situations where the customer's business might be lost, your conversations and how you handled of the complaint should be carefully documented. If necessary, report the situation to your manager. You should also record the information and maintain a file of customer complaints.

Referring Complaints Upward

Whenever possible try to resolve complaints yourself. Never refuse to help customers take their complaints higher up within your own organisation if they wish to do so.

It is important to have a clear understanding of the type of complaint you can handle, and which you are to refer to someone else. You also need to have a clear idea of how much authority you have in resolving complaints. When you are going to refer a complaint to your manager, follow these five steps:

- ① Have all the facts and information about the problem on hand. All of this data should be confirmed by the customer as being correct.
- ② Have a clear idea of what the

customer wants and what they are asking be done about the problem.

- ③ Be ready to give an account of your conversation with the customer and tell your manager what you said to the customer. Explain the alternatives you offered and the customer's reactions to them. Be honest and accurate and don't distort the facts of the situation to make yourself look good in the eyes of your manager. If you try to fake it, you may make the situation worse.
- ④ Next, make sure you inform your manager of any promises you made to your customer. Be ready to recommend to your manager what you feel should be done now.
- ⑤ Lastly, you should come away from your meeting with your manager with a clear idea of what your role is going to be from this point onwards. Are you going to keep working on the problem or turn it over to your manager entirely? If you are to turn it over entirely, agree with your manager as to when and how you will be told about the final outcome.

If the customer asks you to speak to your manager immediately, ask for a chance to help them first. Then promise the customer that if you don't handle the situation to their satisfaction, you personally will make sure they get a chance to talk to your manager.

Good luck in using these important 10 steps - especially Step 3. You will amaze your customers and yourself with the results you get when you use GLAD - SURE - SORRY as your first response to a complaint.

Next edition we will look at another aspect of The 'GOBER METHOD' for delivering superior customer service - Professional Telephone Techniques



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CALLED UPON TO SERVE

In the fourth part of a series designed for you to share with your front-line staff, Mary Gober explains another aspect of The 'Gober Method' for delivering superior service. In this edition we prune your skills to top up your telephone techniques



There are big differences between the techniques needed to serve people personally and on the telephone. Understanding the rules of the telephone game can gain you a vital edge in customer service.

Time distortion

For most people a few seconds on the telephone seems like many minutes. This is partly because a customer who is asked to wait, or who experiences a

brief delay, has nothing to do during that time. They get impatient much more quickly than they might otherwise. It is also due to people's expectation that telephones should work "instantly". Any delay or waiting time is unexpected and frustrating.

A customer visiting someone in person without an appointment would be quite willing to wait a few minutes before being seen. They would realise that as they were not expected the

person they wanted might be occupied. But when calling by telephone people are less tolerant.

Alienation and distance

Telephone communications also have a dimension of distance. There is a high potential for making customers feel alienated and "left out" during delays and waiting times. It is to overcome this phenomenon that some organisations now play music when callers are put on hold or asked to wait. The music is supposed to comfort the caller and make them feel less "left out". You need to be aware of the potential to alienate customers and do everything you can to make a call warmer and more personal, especially if you have to make them wait.

Lack of visual contact

You need to compensate for the fact that two people are unable to see each other during a telephone call. In a face-to-face transaction customers can see what is happening. On the telephone you need to tell customers what you are doing for them. Keep them informed of actions you are taking.

This is particularly true if you have to leave the telephone to do something as part of the service transaction. Don't just say to the customer something like:

A customer visiting someone in person without an appointment would be quite willing to wait a few minutes before being seen. They would realise that as they were not expected the person they wanted might be occupied. But when calling by telephone people are less tolerant

"Just a minute" and leave them waiting. Instead, explain your intentions, saying what you are doing and how long you will take.

Speed and action

Take a moment when answering calls. We tend to associate the telephone with speed and fast action. When it rings it may sound like a starting bell. You may be tempted to snatch it, start talking fast and get stampeded by a simple call.

You would do better to stay calm as you prepare to use the telephone. It is helpful if you take a few seconds to compose yourself so you can make a transition from what you were doing just prior to the call. This will give you time to put a smile in your voice and answer properly with a friendly, courteous greeting.

Importance and urgency

In its early days, the telephone was used only for very important calls. The ringing of the telephone always seems to be an urgent signal. Perhaps you have been serving someone in person and been interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. You must learn to take the call, but then inform the caller: "I am busy with another customer now, but I'll be with you in a few moments." If you don't the customer you were serving in person could become frustrated.

Interruption

Every telephone call is an interruption for the person being called. If you use the telephone in your job, you need to adjust your attitude. Accept calls as interruptions, but understand that these calls are an essential part of your job.

Many people assume that the person they're calling is immediately ready to respond. They assume that what you are doing is less important than their call. This sort of arrogance can be particularly trying. But since the customer has no way of knowing if they are interrupting you, it is up to you to let them know. If you can take the call

immediately, do so. If not, explain this to your customer and put them on hold or tell them you will call them back later.

Courtesy

Because there is such an emphasis on speed and urgency, courtesy is often overlooked. The attitude of some seems to be that if they are fast and effective in getting information across, they are excused from having to observe the normal rules of manners. Nothing could be further from the truth. Without face-to-face contact, courtesy can only be observed through words and phrases. Telephone calls without even this verbal courtesy are likely to be highly frustrating for the customer and make them angry.

Anonymity

With just a voice at the other end of a telephone conversation, identifying people is difficult. Customers like to know who they are talking to. For this reason, you must always be quick to identify yourself, your department and your ability to help the customer. If you identify yourself, customers are more likely to identify themselves, thus making your telephone transactions more effective.

Telephone Skills

By the time children are six or seven, they have usually learnt how the telephone works. But many people

never progress beyond that early stage of telephone skill. Quality service on the telephone requires familiarity with more refined skills and the knowledge of what to say, how to say it and when.

Telephone management

With the increase in more sophisticated use of the telephone has come the need to pay closer attention to telephone management. The location and number of telephones, kinds of equipment, location of supporting furniture and equipment, message forms, systems and procedures - all these need to be worked out carefully. This will help to ensure that there is a consistent and efficient approach in your office to utilising the telephone. This also includes the use of a list of frequently-called numbers, directories, and the ready availability of information that is needed in answering customer calls.

Need for information

The possibility for mistakes, errors and misunderstandings are greater on the telephone. For this reason you need to develop the skill of repeating information, asking for confirmation, and spelling and clarification where there could be confusion. It is also helpful for you to develop the habit of keeping written records of your conversations and noting critical data. This can help later to facilitate confirmation of what was said, if necessary.



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