

3 Strategies to Create Amazing Customer Service

Our customers are our greatest assets. And since competitive alternatives exist in almost every sector, it is critical to develop a customer service strategy that takes customers beyond merely adequate service levels and propels them into the realm of what we like to call, "*Amazing Customer Service*."

Here are three strategies to help your business create *Amazing Customer Service*.

1. Ensure That Your Desired Professional Image and Your Perceived Professional Image are Aligned

The goal of *Amazing Customer Service* providers is to demonstrate professionalism in all customer interactions. But what does that really mean? Quite simply, combined with the expectation that you embody capability, trustworthiness, humility and caring, your customers expect you to display expert knowledge in the area that you are working in.

And it is all about perception. Ask yourself: Have you and your staff cultivated a set of qualities and characteristics that gives others the perception of competence and character? And is there a difference between your *desired* professional image (what you want your customers to say about you to other customers) and your *perceived* professional image (what you think your customers are saying about you to other customers)?

The truth is that you can never know exactly what all of your customers or peers think about you, or how they would describe you when you aren't in the room. You can, however, draw conclusions about your current professional image based on your interactions with key customers and clients. Consider that people often give you direct

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feedback about your persona that tells you what they think about your level of competence, character, and commitment. You also may receive indirect signals about your image. This comes through job assignments or referrals and recommendations. Be open and aware to these forms of feedback. Taken together, these direct and indirect signals shape your best guess of how you are perceived, and can be the key to making necessary changes to get your desired and perceived professional images to align.

2. Make a Good First Impression

Experts have said that we evaluate each other within the first three seconds of meeting. That's not much time to make an impression, so the more you prepared you are to maximize the impact of that first contact, the better chance you have of making a good first impression.

There are five key elements involved in making a good first impression: dressing the part, speaking clearly, personalizing the contact, being a good listener and keeping a visually appealing work area.

Dressing the Part: Although today's business environment is far more casual than it was even 10 years ago, it is still important to dress the part. This doesn't mean that you have to wear the latest Gucci suit, but do make sure that your clothing is clean and fits well. The last thing you want to do is give off a negative impression before you even open your mouth. If you look sloppy, people will assume that you and your business are sloppy as well.

Speaking Clearly: The key here is to communicate clearly with the people you are speaking with. Speak at a moderate pace and in a well-modulated voice. Be polite and courteous, watch your tone of voice and enunciation, and be aware of where you put the emphasis in your dialogue.

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Personalizing the Contact: How many of you have been on the phone with a business, maybe trying to buy something or get information, and because of the flow of their computer screens they ask you 12 times for your name? How did you feel? Now take a minute to think of someone you have met recently. Did you remember and use their name right away in conversation? Good! The other person knew that you were paying attention from the very start of the meeting and valued them enough to remember their name. A bonus here is that by using their name immediately in the discussion you will be more likely to memorize it and impress them even more should you run into them a second time. Everyone is flattered when remembered by others.

Be a Good Listener: Being a good listener starts with focusing on the person you are speaking to. When having a discussion with someone, make sure to let him or her know, in a subtle manner, that you are paying attention to what is being said. Look directly into their eyes, don't be afraid to nod your head and chime in with the occasional "I see," or "I understand," or any other verbal or physical cue that shows the other person that you are indeed listening attentively. Also, feel free to ask questions (preferably non-threatening ones) if you are unsure of what the other person is trying to communicate. Do not interrupt, and don't allow interruptions (such as phones or other people) to distract you from the conversation at hand.

Maintain a Visually Appealing Work Area: Make sure your workspace is clutter free. Ensure any confidential/sensitive files are not left in full view, and that your lunch and coffee cup are not the first thing that customers will see on your desk. Have your work supplies handy and in working order. Remember, it is all about first impressions! If a customer or client can't see you for the clutter, or can hear you shuffling around looking for a pen, they won't have a very positive first impression!

3. Create Win-Win Situations

Creating win-win situations is not only one of the best business strategies going, but one of the best life strategies too. Don't fall into trap of thinking that for you and your business to benefit, someone else has to lose. Consider the number of missed opportunities you would have if you chose to burn your bridges rather than build strong networks with others.

Creating win-win situations means constantly looking for and working towards mutual benefit in relationships. It means cooperation, not competition. It is an assertive approach that allows you to effectively influence, listen and negotiate with others so that all parties feel good about a decision, situation or discussion - no one feels like a loser.

Win-win situations also tie in with aligning your desired professional image with your perceived image. Word travels fast when you create win-win situations, but far faster when someone is left feeling that they have been done wrong or got the short end of the stick in some capacity.

A win-win attitude will make people will seek you out, tell their friends about you and is a surefire way for you to build your reputation as a provider of *Amazing Customer Service*.

- By Sylvia Brade
The Marrek Group

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