

## **Customer Loyalty is Up to You**

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Organizations continually struggle with ways to attract new customers while maintaining their current ones. This is often driven by something called “customer loyalty.” By definition, this is nothing more than keeping customers happy and fulfilling their needs and expectations so that they continue to do business with your organization. The challenge is how to make that happen.

Many strategies can be used to establish and maintain customer loyalty. The following are some ideas that might help you in building a stronger relationship with your customers:

### **Provide peace of mind**

As you work with customers, do so positively and assertively. Assure them through your words and actions that you are confident, have their best interests at heart-and are in control of the situation. Let them know that their calls/messages, questions, needs, and issues will be addressed professionally and in a timely manner. Reassure them that what they purchase is the best quality, has a solid warranty, will be backed by the organization, and will address their needs while providing many benefits. Also, reinforce that their requests and data will be processed rapidly and promises will be met. All of these things can lead them to the belief that they made the right decision in selecting you and your organization and that you will take care of their needs.

### **Keep your word**

Customers have many choices in selecting a service provider. If they feel you cannot be depended upon to take action, they simply leave; Often, without complaint or comment. When you tell customers you will do something, do it. Do not promise what you cannot deliver since many people take your word as your bond. Break the bond and you risk destroying the relationship. If feasible following service, contact your customer to ensure he or she was satisfied and that your service met expectations. This follow-up can be an informal call or a more formal questionnaire. Always strive to *under-promise and over-deliver*. For example, a customer drops off film to be processed at your store on Tuesday where a display chart guarantees it will be back on Saturday. If possible, develop it sooner and call to tell the customer it's ready. When he or she comes to pick it up, give a coupon for a discount on the next roll of film. Tell them it's because you value them as a customer.

### **Trust your customers**

Most customers are not out to cheat or "rip you (or your organization) off." They do want the best value and service for their money and look to you to provide it. Make a good faith effort to accomplish this and deal openly. This includes communicating openly, listening objectively to their questions and concerns, servicing to the best of your ability, showing compassion for their needs, and demonstrating that you are their advocate when things go wrong (if appropriate).

One of the most common mistakes service providers make in dealing with customers who have a complaint or problem is to verbally acknowledge and agree, but nonverbally send a message of skepticism. For example, suppose a customer comes in to complain about a defective product purchased. As they are describing the symptoms of the problem, you use some of the paralinguistic phrases discussed in earlier chapters (e.g. Uh huh, I see, Hummm), however, the inflection used or tone of voice communicated questioning or doubt (e.g. "I seeee?" or "Hmmm?"). How do you think the customer might feel or perceive you at that point?

### **Be decisive**

Decisiveness relates to being able and willing to make a decision and take necessary actions to fulfill customer needs. Taking a wait and see, or a dependent approach to customer service often leads to customer dissatisfaction. Just as you probably do, customers value their time. By keeping them waiting while you run to someone else for a decision or answer can be frustrating. Granted, such a situation is sometimes created by the management style of supervisors or policies that require certain approvals (e.g. check approvals, returns or refunds, or discounts). However, those are internal issues that should be resolved BEFORE the customer encounters them. If you face such barriers, think of alternative ways of handling them, and then approach your supervisor with suggestions for improvement. Your ideas will not only potentially make your life easier, but they can also reduce your customer's opportunity for dealing with a frustrating and nonproductive service encounter.

### **Be enthusiastic**

Attaining and maintaining a level of excitement about your customers, products, services, organization, and job that says, "I'm happy to help you," is an important step towards establishing a relationship as discussed earlier. If you are enthusiastic about serving your customers, they will often respond by loyally supporting you and the organization. People typically respond positively to enthusiastic employees who appear to be enjoying themselves as they work. This should not be interpreted as saying that providers should act unprofessionally or create an environment where they have fun while sacrificing customer service or attention to their customers.

The long-term benefit is that if you and your organization can generate return customers through enthusiasm, the potential for organizational growth and prosperity exists. This in turn sets the stage for better benefits, salary, and workplace modifications that lead to higher employee enthusiasm. So, all the elements are connected in cyclical pattern and contribute to successful customer service.

By using these simple strategies when dealing with customers you and your organization can be on your way to building stronger, ongoing relationships with current and future customers.

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