

How-To Develop Great Customer Service Skills



The quality of a company's customer service can determine the fate of a business. After all, loyal customers can be your most reliable form of revenue. You often receive more return business and improved relationships with your customers. Your customers can be both internal to your company, or external. Some positions within the company serve other departments so they would be your customers as well and anyone who buys what your company sells.

There are some universal qualities that create great customer service. Make sure your employees are equipped to perform these duties.

Patience:

It is easy to get frustrated with customers. After all, at some point, you might feel like you are answering the same question 100 times per day. However, patience is fundamental to providing high quality customer service. Stay patient. The experience is new to your customer.

Attentiveness:

When you are attentive, you could gather valuable customer feedback. For example, if you receive repetitive complaints about not being able to configure the settings on your device or program, that could lead to a product improvements that makes that process much easier and intuitive. That would solve your customer's complaints and hopefully lead to a better product.

Knowledge of the Product:

Your customer service representatives must have a deep knowledge of how the product works. That way, they will be prepared to answer your customers questions.

Your customer service representatives do not need to know how to build the product from scratch but they do need to have a functional perspective of the products. Consider providing your employees with free samples and company discounts so they have experience with the products.

Ability to Handle Surprises:

Sometimes the customer support career is going to throw you a curveball. You might not have come across the customer's problem before.

When this occurs, your employee may need to send the customer to someone with more knowledge in that area. Make sure they know who to send customers to in specific situations.

Time Management Skills:

Your customer was probably excited about their purchase and wants the product functioning as quickly as possible. Do not waste time on the phone and try to get directly to their issue.

Sometimes, your employee will not be able to solve their problem. Teach them to recognize when they cannot solve a problem and what to do in those situations. Great customer service is efficient.

Superior customer service should be a priority for your business. If you spend the time training your employees and gathering valuable customer feedback than you could see an increase in revenue and the reputation of your company.

How-To Say “No” at Work



Time is a precious commodity. You use it or lose it. Most of us do not have all the time to participate in the activities that we enjoy. Often, we are short on time because of saying “yes” when we should say “no”.

As a business professional, saying “yes” can become habitual. You may be taking advantage of every opportunity to improve your career. However, always saying “yes” can end up making us miss deadlines and decreasing our quality of work.

Before you say “yes” to your next project, gain a perspective on your daily tasks and the amount of time that it takes to complete a project. Then learn to say “no”.

STEP ONE: Learn Your Priorities

Everyone has daily tasks. What are yours? Write them down and figure out how much time they take to complete every day. After you figure out what you **HAVE** to do, you can figure out what else you **CAN** do.

STEP TWO: Check Your Calendar

We often respond to requests with a quick “yes”. Stop! Check your calendar before you agree to your projects. This will give you the opportunity to evaluate whether the project is realistic in your schedule.

STEP THREE: Trust Your Gut

Your intuition can be the best indicator of whether you should accept a new project. If deliberating the task makes you feel stressed then re-consider accepting the new responsibility.

Fear of telling a person “no” leads many professionals to undertake new projects. This type of person is commonly referred to as a people pleaser. Eventually, being a people pleaser leads to exhaustion and burn-out.

Learn to tell people “no” before you become overwhelmed.

Tricks to Tell Client, Boss, or Co-Worker “No”

1. Be Honest. It’s worse to give them false hope of you helping.
2. Suggest an Alternative Service Provider
3. Ask For a Raincheck, or tell them when you CAN help them.
4. Clearly State Your “No” Without Being Defensive. Simply tell them you can’t take on their project with your current workload.

Sometimes, the best things to do in life is minimize. Saying “no” minimizes your clutter of projects.

How-To Build Strong Leadership Skills



Strong leadership is a learned skill. Depending on the type and size of business, there are always methods to improve. Whether you are a business owner, executive, or manager, it is important that you are always analyzing your team’s response to your management.

The following methods could help you improve your leadership. Doing so can lead to happier and more productive employees.

Be a Positive Role Model

Do not expect your employees to work any harder than yourself. Employees often use management as criteria for their own work ethic. When you are working, think about how you would like your employees to act. If you are on Facebook every hour then you cannot get frustrated with employees who are constantly checking their social media notifications.

Find a Mentor

Nobody knows it all. Find a mentor who has also served as a business leader. You can seek tips and guidance from their experience.

Encourage Creativity

If employees are given the flexibility to use creative thinking, you may be surprised by the insight that they can bring to the table. Creative thinking can be intimidating for many employees. However, new ideas could be what makes your company unique among competition.

How to Influence Creative Thinking in the Workplace

- Use an “idea first, measurement second” mindset. Eventually your company must be data-driven but allow flexibility for new ideas.
- Use innovation teams to come up with new ideas.
- Reward employee with bonuses if their idea is used.
- Create a positive work environment so employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas without criticism.

Study Past Leaders

Most business leaders spend their time looking forward. Unfortunately, some of

your most valuable lessons can be learned from the past. Study past leader's successes and failures. After all, history repeats itself.

Great Modern Entrepreneurs to Learn From

1. Elon Musk
2. Steve Jobs
3. Oprah Winfrey
4. Walt Disney
5. Bill Gates

Be Humble

Great leaders admit their mistakes and share credit for successes. If you play the blame game, eventually your employees will look for employment elsewhere. People want to feel respected.

Communicate Effectively

As a leader, you probably get very busy. Nevertheless, you cannot build a great team without maintaining time to communicate with your team.

Occasionally, ask your employees how they are doing. Your employees should feel comfortable confronting you with questions and concerns.

Strong leaders can build great companies. If you are in a leadership position, focus on improving your skills to help lead your company to success.

5 Rewarding Team Building

Exercises for an Evolving Company



Every business owner strives for a workplace where their team members work together positively. However, building unity within the workplace requires time and effort. Incorporate team building exercises to help employees adjust to an evolving company.

The following are a few fun team building activities for the workplace:

Provide a Comfortable Break Room with Snacks and Beverages

Everyone needs to get away from their desk during the day. A comfortable break room offers your employees a place to rejuvenate or eat lunch. Inevitably, the break room often becomes a gathering place where employees build community.

Creating a comfortable break room takes little effort. Maintain a few snacks, such as granola bars or fresh fruit, as well as coffee and other work appropriate beverages.

Sponsor Job Shadowing Opportunities for Employees in a Different Position

New employees are often attracted to their job position due to the opportunity for growth. Use job shadowing as an opportunity to introduce the employee to the position while meeting others in the department. Job shadowing is easy to manage with little costs. Job shadowing is essential if an employee is considering transitioning to a new position.

What to Include in Job Shadow

1. Participate in Brainstorming Session
2. Attend a Meeting
3. Take Notes During Planning Sessions
4. Variety of Non-Confidential Activities

Hold Company-Sponsored Team Building Lunches

Food always has a way of pulling people together! Get your employees out of the office with a barbeque or restaurant outing. If your meal is outside, you can schedule fun games where employees work together. Sports work well for team building.

Sponsor Sporting Event or Team that Employees Can Participate in Together

Create a sporting team for your company to participate in together. This could be a community softball, basketball, or kickball league.

You could also sponsor a sporting event, such as a half-marathon or 5k. Provide your employees with company t-shirts. The t-shirts not only create unity but great advertising!

Encourage Team Members to Volunteer for Charity Together

The camaraderie that people develop when they volunteer together is powerful. Create a volunteer event with a local charity. The event could be picking up trash, building homes for poor families, or cleaning hiking trails. Volunteering together can create positive memories that unite the company.

Host Activities for Employee's Families

Company lunches are great but many employees have families that they would love to involve with events. Hold family-friendly events where employees can develop friendships outside of work. The holidays are a great excuse to hold company parties.

Family-Friendly Events to Host

1. Halloween trick-or-treating at desks in the office and pumpkin carving for the kids.
2. Luncheon the week before Christmas before employees scatter their own ways.
3. Bringing a big screen to the office for family movie night.

Team building exercises can be an investment for your company. When people work well together, they can get more done faster with a positive attitude. It is important to continue team building as your company grows.

Interview Questions to Avoid Asking Infographic



Some interview questions should be avoided to prevent a lawsuit. Know those questions before you meet your first candidate.

How to Avoid Asking Illegal or Inappropriate Interview Questions

Some interview questions are obviously discriminatory and avoided by all employers. Other questions are more subtle. Learn what questions to recognize and avoid.

This infographic is based on the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) guidelines.

Birthplace, Ethnicity, or Religion



Avoid questions regarding a candidate's birthplace, religious, or ethnicity.

DO ASK:

1. Are you eligible to work in the United States or would you need an employer to sponsor a work visa?
2. What languages are you fluent in?
3. Can you work the days required on the schedule?

DONT ASK:

1. What country are you from? Where were you born?
2. What is your native language?
3. What religion do you practice?

Marital Status, Children, or Sexual Preference



Marital status, children, or sexual preference should not be a concern when hiring.

DO ASK:

1. Are you available to work overtime on occasion?
2. What are your long term career goals?
3. Are any of your references or qualifications under a different name?

DONT ASK:

1. Do you have or plan to have children?
2. Is this your maiden name?
3. If you go on maternity leave, do you plan on returning to work?

Gender or Age



Ask questions regarding whether the candidate can handle the role but avoid gender or age questions.

DO ASK:

1. What can you bring to this role?
2. Are you over the age of 18?
3. Do you have a degree or other qualification related to this role?

DONT ASK:

1. We have always had a man/woman perform this role. Do you think you could do it?
2. How much longer do you plan to work before you retire?
3. When did you graduate?

Location and Lifestyle Choices



What an employee does outside of work should have no bearing on whether they are suitable for the job.

DO ASK:

1. Are you able to be at this job by 9 AM?
2. Are you a member of any professional group that is relevant to this role?
3. Do you have any upcoming commitments that will make you miss work?

DONT ASK:

1. Where do you live?
2. Are you a member of any club or organization?

Four Causes of an Unproductive Workplace



Have you ever heard a business owner say they want to be less productive? I have not! Most business owners want to save time and money.

However, workplace productivity is not always easy. A healthy workflow requires collaboration for the business owner and team to succeed. Learn how to avoid these common workplace problems to prevent tasks from taking hours to complete.

Poor Systems Communication

We create new client file or update important documents almost every day. If your coworkers do not receive the same information then important company procedures could be postponed.

Cloud-based file sharing has become one of the most efficient methods to collaborate information within a company. No longer will you have to email documents within your company. Simply create shared folders that can be accessed by the necessary team members.

There are several file sharing systems that could work for your company.

Dropbox

Dropbox allows you to take your documents, photos, and videos anywhere you go.

Place files in your Dropbox and share quickly with a link.

Lastpass

Lastpass allows you to “organize and create strong passwords”. Login to Lastpass, save a password, and share with essential team members. No longer will you have to ask for credit card information or login information every time you need it!

Google Drive

Google Drive provides file sharing and document creation software. More than 120 million users choose to use Google Drive. Users gain free access to 15 gigabytes of shared storage, which includes Gmail. Files can be shared privately with anyone that has a Gmail Account.

Unfortunately, if the user does not have a Gmail account then the file will have to be made public through a shareable link. Many businesses choose not to use Google Drive since the business owner cannot rely on every team member or client utilizing Gmail.

Pointless Meetings

Have you ever been in a meeting and realized that you really don't need to be there? Most employees have! Verify meetings are operating efficiently to save time, money, and frustration.

Tips to Create an Effective Meeting

- Plan an agenda.
- Make sure you need the meeting.
- Ensure appropriate participation.
- Review work prior to the meeting.

Not Collaborating with Remote Employees

The internet has made hiring remote employees easier and more affordable.

Employers also have access to talent from around the world.

A survey completed by The Global Leadership Summit in London found that 34% of business leaders claim that more than half of their workforce will be remote in 2020. The problem is maintaining collaboration with coworkers.

To create a better collaboration process, maintain weekly meetings through a conference call. Also, watch that your team is uploading and maintaining documents through file sharing software.

Unorganized Files

A subscription to Dropbox and Google Drive is not enough to keep your folders organized. Each team member needs to stay aware of folder placement, file name, and more to avoid losing hours of recreating documents. Manage a simple file sharing system to help maintain a productive workflow.

Tips to Organize Your Files

- Collaborate with team to ensure that everyone is using the same file share software.
- Limit folder creation. Think in hierarchies when you create your folders, such as client names or projects.
 - Don't save anything on your desktop.

Developing a healthy workflow will not occur immediately. Consistent organization and collaboration can lead to an increase in workplace productivity.

The Hidden Costs of Low-Ball

Offers



Making an offer to a candidate at the lowest end of the range (or below) is just being responsible for your budget, right? At first glance you may think so, but are you really saving money? In my 20+ years of experience in putting candidates and companies together my answer would be a big NO, especially in a market that is very competitive for talent, and the better candidates may have other offers to consider as well.

Some of the companies that are known for making low offers feel they are being shrewd in their negotiations with candidates, and some even justify their low offers by saying they are trying to make sure people are accepting their offers because they really want to join their company and it's not just about the money. And while that may be true, but the company better have other things going for them (excellent benefits, unique or interesting technology, advancement opportunities, better commute, etc.) to keep those new hires onboard.

In some cases a company is not even aware they are making a low offer, but rely on some salary guide that is out of touch with the realities of the market.

From a candidate's perspective, the salary negotiations and enthusiasm for accepting an offer and joining a company that makes a low offer is drastically different from a company that makes a good (or even just a fair) offer. Candidates that are currently unemployed with no other pending offers may be reluctant to accept a low offer thinking they may miss out on a better offer. Or, they may accept the offer but continue to look for other/better opportunities and leave within a year anyway, leaving the company to go through the recruiting and training process again and incur all of the costs associated with it.

If the candidate receives a low offer from a company they quickly begin to lose

the excitement they had when they applied for the position, and begin to wonder if the company will be cheap in other resources and in future raises. And if they have other offers, a low offer can make an offer from a less desirable company look better and increase the likelihood they will take the other offer. In some cases, a delayed counter-offer from their previous employer may also be more tempting if they have accepted a low offer from a new company.

You also need to consider the costs incurred by the position being open longer because you can't get your offers accepted. There are costs associated with someone not being in the role you are trying to fill, and the revenue that would be generated by a good, productive employee being in that role. Insurance companies and the American Management Association calculate that each employee generates between 5x-10x the salary they are paid in revenue for the company. You can see how quickly the costs for every day the position remains open can accumulate. Not to mention the burnout of the other employees that are picking up the slack.

While salary guides can be useful tools they should not be relied on completely since you also have to take into account what your competition is offering for the same talent. Knowing and exceeding a candidate's salary expectations can pay off big dividends because the candidate is more motivated to show they are worth the money you are offering, and will work to exceed your expectations as well, which will ultimately save the company money in the long run. Remember, you get what you pay for. A happy and productive employee is a very valuable asset. Let them know you really want them on your team with a good offer and enjoy the additional benefits. It ultimately saves you more money than a low offer and increases your chances of attracting top talent.

What Hiring Managers Look For in

a Great Potential Employee



Hiring managers are looking for more than skills and experience to give you the job. The job market is tough and you must make yourself stand out. Whether you are looking for a career change or an upgrade to your job, you can improve the likelihood that you will get the position with these seven traits.

Natural Leader

All employers want to see that you have the ability to lead. This proves that you have potential to move up the career ladder. Hiring and training natural leaders can be a long-term investment. Prove that your leadership skills can be developed to make yourself stand out in the company interview.

The following are questions and answers that depict leadership. Determine if this interviewee is you and find a creative way to answering the questions.

Leadership Interview Questions

How would you attract someone to listen to you and to follow you?

Having charisma, being a role model, and connecting with others.

Describe a situation when you successfully led someone toward the success of a big goal.

Answer Tip: You should always choose a positive situation. Talk about a moment when person you led achieved the goal they wanted. On the top of that, you

should be able to demonstrate your leadership qualities and an added value on the examples.

When have you had a problem with motivation?

Sample Answer: “ I have never had problems with personal motivation. Of course, there are difficult situations in job, especially if one is a leader and carries all the responsibility on their shoulders. But I somehow understand in my head that setbacks are essential steps on the way to final success. This is my personal philosophy.”

Creative

Successful companies rely on innovation to get ahead. If you think outside of the box then it is more likely that you can get the job and increase your position in the company. Recruiters are always looking for a potential employee that can bring something new to the table.

When you are speaking with a potential employer, provide examples of when you have used innovation for company development.

Passionate

Passion almost always trumps high qualifications. Employers are looking for passionate employees who will work the hardest. Even if you do not have the right qualification, make sure that you show your passion in your interview, resume, and cover letter.

How Introverts Can Show Passion During a Job Interview

Use your superior listening skills to find instances where you can talk about your interests in relation to the job. Better yet, you can come up with ways to steer the conversation toward your interests, such as by asking your interviewer questions. You may also want to state your excitement and interest in the position at the end of each interview. Don't be afraid to show them the passion you have for this opportunity. It may be the thing that puts you first in their mind when deciding who to hire.

Fast Decision Making

Employers look for fast decision makers who create efficiency in the company. According to Forrester, for every hour a product team takes on heads-down work, they spend another 48 minutes waiting for decision makers. That equates to 3.5 hours of “wait time” in an average eight-hour day. If a company cuts wait times in half, it can gain more than \$370,000 annually in productive time across a 25-person team.

Faster decision makers can save the company money. Show that you make smart, efficient decisions to get hired.

Commitment

The success of an organization is often determined by the commitment of their employees. A dedicated, persistent and committed employee will improve the performance of a company. Show that you are dedicated to the company’s purpose during your interview.

Key Characteristics of a Committed Employee

- Good Communication
 - Well Organized
 - Enthusiastic
 - Positive

The Will to Win

A great employee consistently improves their work performance. This determination means that they exceed the expectations every day for the company. Employees with the will to win make a lasting impression.

Prepare yourself to make a lasting impression as a committed and responsible employee if you are applying for jobs. Your first impression could determine whether you get the job of your dreams.

How-To Build Great Company Culture



Wouldn't it be great if you weren't constantly forced to train new employees? A great way to maintain your employees is to build a thriving company culture. Doing so, influences your employees to work cohesively as a team, therefore drive productivity and business success.

Creating a great company culture is not easy. However, the benefits from investing in your team can improve the performance of your company and keep employees with you longer.

Learn from the Past

Your past can be your greatest teacher. If your company struggles with culture, review the mishaps. If they are reoccurring then consider the root of the problem. Was it a lack of communication or management oversight? On the other hand, consider when you had great company culture. What cultivated the success?

Create a Culture that Aligns with Your Core Values

This is your business. It is important to find staff that aligns with your values. The first step is to figuring out what is important to you.

Core Values to Consider

- Teamwork
 - Quality
 - Innovation
- Customer Service
- Sense of Urgency

Hire Employees Who Complement You

Identify your strengths and weaknesses, and then fill in the gaps. You should hire for what your company needs. The employee will adapt much better to your office when they feel important. Doing so, will create a more well-rounded team.

Communicate With Your Team

Communication is key in relationships – even business relationships! Make sure you are communicating with your employees and they are communicating with each other. Important communication should also be in-person, rather than over email, phone, or text.

If your company is struggling with communication then consider the following tips:

- Hold Weekly Meetings
 - Offer a Platform, such as Officevibe, for Anonymous Feedback
- Watch Your Body Language - Remember to smile, maintain eye contact, and keep your arms uncrossed.
 - Know When to Listen
 - Keep Your Door Open

Carefully Evolve Your Culture

Building a great company culture will not happen overnight. First, make sure that you have a clear vision for what you want. Second, introduce those changes to your employees and seek employees with the same values.

Build Excitement About Your Company

Your employees must believe in your company. To build excitement about your brand, you must show your own excitement!

How-To Build Brand Excitement

- Hold an Event. For example, celebrating the release of a new product or service.
 - Individually thank employees for a job well-done.
- Create beautiful marketing material - Videos, Facebook Posts, or Guest Blogs.

If you create a culture where people love coming to work then you can expect to see an improvement in company performance, and most important, an improvement of your happiness and the happiness of your employees.

Effective Leadership Techniques to Build a Great Working Team



The foundation of almost every productive team is a strong leader. As a business owner or manager, it is important to establish effective leadership techniques to operate your team well. Your employees will be looking up to you to create boundaries and unify the group.

If you are not acting as a strong leader then it is time that you start! Here are a few leadership techniques to build a great working team.

Stay Consistent

Consistency is key. A consistent leader is more trustworthy and creates clearer expectations for the team to make decisions. To be consistent, you must reward the same behaviors, discourage other behaviors, and treat every team member equally.

Use Thoughtful, Concise, and Accurate Communication

Communication can dictate the success of almost any type of relationship. Make sure that you are using thoughtful, concise, and accurate communication when you relay any type of message with your team. This includes emails, phone calls, and in-person discussions.

Publicly Reward Hard Work

Public acknowledgement reassures employees that their hard work is being noticed. Reward your employee with a bonus, PTO, or gift when they perform superior work. See our article on employee rewards for more ideas.

Be a Good Example

Live by example! I am sure that is a phrase you have heard before. If you want your team to arrive on-time than you must arrive on-time. As a leader or manager, the team is looking at you to set the expectations for the company.

Encourage All Opinions and Ideas

Do not discourage employees from expressing their ideas, concerns, or opinions. Different perspectives can create new ideas that benefit the company.

Establish the Goal of Working as a Team

Setting goals is imperative to evaluate the performance of your team. Your goals

should be according to your organization's needs, such as cut costs, drive skills, or increase revenue. Defining goals can help your team work together toward a common objective.

Use the SMART framework to create achievable goals:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-Bound

Create Ground Rules for the Team

When multiple people spend 40+ hours together, there needs to be ground rules. Your ground rules help create unison and clear expectations for your employees.

Examples of Ground Rules at the Office

- Be on time
- Every team member has the right to make a suggestion
- Dress code

Remain as Transparent as Possible

Your employees want a leader that they can trust. If you withhold information or lie you will jeopardize the relationship with your team.

Show You Care

To be viewed as someone who is a leader they want to follow and be loyal to you need to show that you care about them as well. Spend a little time to get to know the people on your team and what drives them. Once they know you care about them, they will care more about helping you achieve your goals as well.

Leadership habits can determine the success of their team. If you are a manager or business owner, evaluate whether you are practicing strong leadership techniques. A few changes may improve the cohesiveness of your team, therefore

helping you reach your company goals.