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Science Reveals Customer Service Secrets

Behavioral Science Unlocks the Key to Perfect Customer Service

From Darrell Zahorsky, former About.com Guide

Customer service has been a widely discussed topic for decades. The early 90's saw a period of quality customer service, exceeding customer expectations and "moments of truth". The technology revolution has brought customer relationship tools and software. Technology allows business of all sizes to manage their customer relationships with profiles, trends and customer history.

It would seem that nothing new has developed from the field of customer service until you know the work of Professor Richard B. Chase and Associate Professor Sriram Dasu at USC's Marshall School of Business.

Professor's Chase & Dasu have applied the field of behavioral science to customer service. They have developed five principles that are simple but profound. The insight gleaned from these principles will leave an impact on customer service for many small businesses when applied.

Five Principles of Customer Service

1. Finish Strong: It's not the beginning of the customer's interaction with your business that is important. It is the end of the interaction that leaves the biggest impression. The final customer interaction is what resides in the memory of your customer. Professor Chase makes a case for consultants to finish their projects with the biggest bang. Ask yourself, what value-added customer service can I provide that will end with a big WOW from customers?

2. Get the Bad Experiences Out of the Way Early: Customer service based on behavioral science, tells us to save the best for last and get the unpleasant side of business out of the way early in the process. This may entail; delivering bad news early or putting unpleasant tasks, such as a lengthy application process at the early stages. Freeing your customers from the bad experiences early, allows them to focus on the positive aspects of your service.

3. Combine the Pain, Segment the Pleasure: Customer's time perception is linked to the number of breaks in the experience. Smaller chunks of pleasant experiences will be perceived as greater than one large segment. Disney incorporates this principle by having shorter amusement rides, giving the customer a better experience. So combine your company's unpleasant tasks together and break-up the enjoyable parts of the business process.

4. Build Commitment Through Choice: Provide your customers with choices in the product or service delivery. According to Professor Chase, a study revealed blood donors experienced less perceived pain when they had a choice of which arm the blood would be drawn from. The lesson here is to create choices for your customer during the business process.

5. Give People Rituals and Stick to Them: Behavioral science tells us that people find comfort in regular, repetitive rituals. Rituals can vary from quick phone call response times to a weekly client progress report. If for some reason, you miss this regular ritual that your customer expects then your customer service takes a big hit.

These five principles of customer service can alter your customer's perceptions forever. Take the time to view the business from your customer's eyes, apply the principles and watch your customer service ratings soar.

Special thanks to Dr. Richard B. Chase for his permission to discuss the five principles of customer service in this article

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