

Why Customer Service Is a Great Training Ground for Employees in Any Position

The job is uniquely suited for giving new employees knowledge and skills that will enable them to succeed at their company. Here's how.



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CHAD KACZMAREK

GUEST WRITER

Senior Implementation Manager at Edgenet

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If you met me in person, you'd know right away that I love to talk.

That's probably how I drew the interest of my current employer, Edgenet, nine years ago. The owners thought my outgoing personality and ability to relate to people would make me a good fit for a customer service job at what was then a fledgling software company.

I had a marketing degree and had never worked in the tech industry before. I knew that I didn't want to sit behind a desk and work with computers all day, but I took a leap of

faith, and ended up making a good choice. Nine years later, I've largely managed to avoid those things I feared, and along the way, I've become an expert in my company's software products and in communicating their value to customers.

For me, customer service has been the doorway to a rewarding career in an industry I never expected to work in. And I'm not alone. My company has a policy of drawing from its customer service department for internal promotions. Many of my colleagues also began in customer service jobs, but were gradually promoted into departments that interested them and matched their personal interests -- product development, quality assurance, marketing and management, among others.

Looking back on my experience in customer service, I realize that the job is uniquely suited for giving new employees knowledge and skills that will enable them to succeed at their company. Here's how.

1. You're forced to learn a lot in a short amount of time.

At Edgenet, we empower our employees to become key contributors by solving problems independently. So, from the very beginning of my time on the customer service team, I faced a variety of situations where I was plunged into new territory as I scrambled to help users solve their problems.

Often, the users I got phone calls from were frustrated or were under pressure from somebody higher up at their company. They needed somebody to empathize and help get their issues resolved immediately, because it could have a real effect on their business's bottom line. My company had faith in me to get in the thick of the weeds to give users the level of support they needed.

As I faced more of these situations, I got better and faster at knowing how to guide users toward solutions. It's undoubtedly stressful, but it's also a great way to learn.

2. You learn how to communicate with internal departments -- and with customers.

When I first started at Edgenet, I remember being overwhelmed by all the technical jargon and acronyms being used. SQA, GDSN, GTIN -- it felt like my coworkers were speaking Mandarin. It wasn't until later that I realized what an advantage my unfamiliarity could be in a customer service position.

I saw that I was approaching these concepts from a perspective similar to that of our customers. More experienced employees might not realize that they're using confusing terminology because they've become desensitized to it. But, as I became an expert in our products, I was able to function as a translator of sorts. I understood how to articulate and demonstrate our products' key benefits and features in a way that made sense to new users. Ultimately, that has allowed me the flexibility to help in different roles at my company, whether as a sales engineer, data engineer or program manager.

3. You discover abilities you didn't know you had.

I sometimes compare customer service to a farm team in baseball -- our new employees who start there have plenty of fresh talent and energy, but may need a little guidance to figure out how they can shine the brightest. Because they get a firsthand look at the problems users are encountering, customer service team members often have the most unique thoughts on how to improve our products.

At my company, we're firm believers that the person who's been here the longest doesn't necessarily have the best idea. And once you understand what we do, the ceiling of your career is up to you to define.

All of my current colleagues who have been around since I started have ascended to high-level positions within the company. Those who have moved on are worth their weight in gold in the marketplace.

The most gratifying part of my job today is coaching and mentoring new employees. I'll sit down with anybody to talk about whatever issues they're facing or to map out a future direction for their career. To help people discover what they're good at and how they can best serve our company's mission -- I don't know how a job could be better than that.