

## CUSTOMER SERVICE FUNDAMENTALS

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### *Nice Is Not Enough: Connecting with Customers*

"So, we're going to waste the day talking about being nice," the fellow said as he crossed his arms across his chest-the universal gesture that screams: I dare you to teach me anything. He was one of the attendees ordered to undergo customer service training that day, and it was clear why.

Although technically competent, he didn't get it nor did the rest of the room full of what can only be described as "reluctant learners."

Even though they knew the products inside and out, the group still had low satisfaction scores. What their employer had realized after they'd been added to the payroll is that technical know-how is not enough to sustain existing customers and attract new ones. These people were driving people to the competition with their words and actions.

Used to the occasional pushback, I responded to Mr. Defiant. "Maybe. Maybe not," I said. "Since you're eager to get things started, let's hear your definition of nice." It was an easy enough task, or was it?

When he dropped his gaze to the workbook in front of him as if the cover might hold an answer, I presented the challenge to the rest of the group. Without exception, they offered illustrations rather than definitions. Their examples revealed the subjective nature of what constitutes nice.

The man's initial comment contained two issues that explained the company's decision to bring in some outside help. He sort of understood that customer service has something to do with being nice- whatever that means- and sitting through a class in this subject was going to be a total waste of time. Luckily, I was up to the challenge of changing his mind.

After about an hour, he started to come round to the idea that exceptional customer service has less to do with being nice than it does with having a positive attitude, a genuine desire to help others, the wherewithal to provide solutions, and an ability to connect with customers. The veneer of nice alone is not enough.



Throughout the day we discussed a few tried and true suggestions:

- Try to view information from your customers' shoes. It will help you to seem more human and understanding.
- Ask questions of your customers and really listen to the answers.
- If customers tell you something is not right, don't dismiss what they say.
- Find ways to agree with your customers when you can.
- Remember that you do what you do all day. What may be familiar to you could be new information to the customer.
- Read body language and verbal cues. By paying attention you should have a good idea of whether you are oversharing or under-sharing information.
- Follow up and do what you say you are going to do.

Experienced consultants and facilitators can give clients the tools they need to use language carefully, adjust attitudes, improve listening skills, and demonstrate empathy, but ultimately, it is up to the participants to put these tools to work.

More importantly, managers and supervisors must walk the talk, reward good behaviors, and address those that are substandard. This requires effort, commitment, and yes, sometimes even being nice.

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