

THE LANGUAGE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Words Count in Customer Service: What You Say Can Hurt or Help You

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me."

That's great for the elementary school playground, but in the world of customer service, words count. What we say to customers can have an enormous impact on how customers view us and how we view ourselves.

Take, for example, "my pleasure" – a signature phrase used by employees the quick-service restaurant Chick-fil- A – it sure sounds better than "no problem". Moreover, it subtly reminds employees that service should look as if it is a pleasure and not a chore.

The discount department store chain Target refers to its customers as guests. While this may not seem like a big deal, it is. Every time the word guest is used in the store, it is a cue that, indeed, customers are guests and should be treated that way.

Disney calls its park employees cast members. This choice in language reinforces the idea that employees are part of the guest experience and are on stage for every visitor to the park.

By choosing words wisely, Businesses can improve the service experience and avoid disasters.

Imagine for a moment that were running a funeral home. You probably would want your employees to avoid phrases such as "have a nice day" when talking with grieving family members. But without a little instruction, could you be sure that that phrase said in countless interactions every day would not be said in yours? I bet not 100% of the time with 100% of employees.

Language should not be left up to chance. Think about your typical customer interactions, and look for languaging opportunities. What do you call customers? How do you refer to employees? How do you say thank you?

By being consistent, your organization is more likely to communicate the messages it wants others to hear.

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