

# Making your Customers Adore You -

helping you to help your customers

*Expert knowledge means success*

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Note: This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

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## Introduction

Most companies say something in their literature about how they care about their customers.

Now don't get too hung up about the word "customer". If it applies to you, that's fine. If the people you care about are called "patients" or "clients" or "consumers" or "diners" or "residents" or even "members", that's fine too because we all understand who we're talking about. We're talking about the people who pay our bills as being "customers".

Without the support of your customers and prospective customers, you don't have a business - the importance of customers is so great that some businesses even say that they're are obsessed with their customers.

If being passionate about customers is an obsession, then we're obsessed. But when we talk about the passion we have for customers, we're not saying it to boast. We're not saying it to persuade you to do anything either.

We're telling you about these things simply because they may help you to create an extraordinary business. One that delights customers and attracts new ones because the old ones act as your advocates and can't stop telling the world how great it is to deal with you. One that has 100% of its customers acting as great referral sources for you.

All this sounds easy in a way. Having goals such as those we've mentioned are goals that any right minded business owner such as you would love to have - delighted customers going around and embarrassing you by the good things they say.

But great service requires an exceptional commitment from everyone in the business. That's what this Publication is all about - providing you with 12 principles to help you and your people listen to and learn from the most important people your business will ever know - your customers.

We hope that you get as inspired about these ideas as we have been.

## The first three great lessons about Customers

The first three great lessons about customers are:

- Customer service is everyone's business. Act as if you're on the front lines - even when you're in the back office.
- Customers can tell you what they want. But if you listen hard, you can hear what they really need.
- Customers don't always know what they need - watch them juggle their problems and you'll see what they do and the troubles and difficulties they encounter - then you'll know exactly what they need.



## 12 principles to help you to listen to and learn from your Customers

### Principle 1

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Customers don't talk to "the company." They talk to you!

### Principle 2

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Great service starts with a good attitude. Your attitude is your business.

If you had to talk to someone, would you want to talk to you? If the answer is "no," it's time for an attitude adjustment!

### Principle 3

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There's only one judge of great service: the customer.

Do you ask customers how they rate your service? If not, how do you know what they think?

### Principle 4

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Customers don't think of themselves as "customers."

They think of themselves as people who need your help. Enjoy helping people - you'll do a better job.

Your customers are customers second - and people first. Your job is to identify customers and to identify with the customers. Learn to look at problems through their eyes.

The Extra Mile - do you solve your customers' problems - in whatever form they take?

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## Principle 5

There's no "right way" to talk to customers.

Every customer is different. Every problem is different. So every conversation is different.

Some companies use prepared scripts when they take calls from customers. This approach makes conversations more efficient - but less valuable. You need to talk to your customers one at a time.

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## Principle 6

Don't just talk to customers - talk to each other in your company! You are the voice of the customer inside the company.

Did a customer say something to you that all of your people need to hear? Did you pass that message along?

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## Principle 7

It's not enough to take care of customers. You have to care about them. Great service isn't just a transaction. It's a bond.

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## Principle 8

Don't just solve problems - create opportunities. You can turn a slip-up into a sale.

All companies make mistakes. At your company you should make good come out of your mistakes. Don't forget: every mistake is a chance to prove how good you can be. Act wisely, and you create a customer for life.

The Extra Mile - don't perform to your expectations. Instead, perform to the customer's expectations. And beyond. But before that, you'll have to find out what your customer really expects.

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## Principle 9.

Don't just listen - learn. Small complaints can generate big improvements.

Do you take notes from your customer conversations? Or do you fix the problems and forget the lessons?

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## Principle 10

Learn to anticipate problems. If you listen to people and look for patterns, you can read customers' minds.

Remember - you can amaze customers! You can dazzle them with your ability to know what they're going to say - before they say it! Study the statistics you keep on customer behaviour. Then listen carefully. You'll begin to know where conversations are going. And the more you do it, the better you get!

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## Principle 11

Every customer call is a judgment call. The deeper your knowledge, the better your judgment.

Have you really used your products and services yourself? Can you offer customers your expert opinions and advice? Like the good hotelier, do you ever "sleep in your own beds"?

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## Principle 12

If you really want to help your customers, don't be afraid to ask questions. Your questions to them will improve your answers because you'll know what they're thinking.

There's no such thing as a stupid question. Your customers aren't embarrassed to ask you anything they want to know. If you're going to answer their questions, you've got to be willing to ask them questions too! What you don't know can hurt. So ask away!

## Keeping the Customer Happy

The Consumer Minister has launched some innovative tools designed to help a business satisfy its customers and improve the service delivered. The tools - a CD-ROM step-by-step guide for business to improve customer service; and a new customer service module for the Small Business Service's Benchmark Index database - have been designed in partnership with business and consumer groups - such as the NCC, the Small Business Service and businesses, including John Lewis and ASDA.

With research showing business spends six times as much to recruit a new customer than to retain an existing one, good customer service is an essential component of a successful business.



Getting it right first time is obviously the secret of good customer service, but where mistakes happen, research shows that a well-handled complaint makes all the difference to customer loyalty.

## What Angers Customers?

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- Being kept on hold for excessive lengths of time, while being told repeatedly how much the organisation values their custom.
- Organisations which ignore basic consumer rights, eg, taking back faulty goods and being refused a refund and told to change it for another product.
- Battling bureaucracy to resolve a problem. Staff should be empowered to tackle complaints immediately.
- Rude or over-friendly staff - both extremes can make customers feel uncomfortable.
- Anonymous staff who refuse to give their names.
- Broken promises - businesses should not make promises to customers which they cannot honour.
- Inflexible delivery times - businesses which refuse to deliver beyond a narrow, fixed time, or at weekends when most customers are at home.
- Lack of customer-friendly complaints handling systems - if it is difficult to complain, most people will not bother. They will simply take their business elsewhere.
- Premium rate advice lines. It would be better customer service to provide freephone or lo-call numbers.
- No human voices on the telephone - mechanised systems will fail to connect to which take customers through a lengthy process only to deliver them back to the beginning.

## Top Ten Tips for Good Customer Service

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- Talk to your customers - carry out surveys. Ask customers what they want and make it easy for them to give you feedback.

- Listen to your customers - listen to complaints and compliments. Don't be defensive - accept criticisms as they will highlight areas for improvement. Let customers know if you are acting on their suggestions.
- Build trust Keep your promises. Deliver when you say you will. If things go wrong put them right quickly.
- Take complaints seriously - **don't be** dismissive or patronising. Have a customer friendly system for dealing with complaints so that if things go wrong, staff are easily accessible to put things right.
- Get it right first time - it saves you time and money if customers are handled well from the outset.
- Make the most of your staff - invest in training. Value them. Empower them to deal quickly with complaints. This will build morale and happy staff lead to happy customers.
- Go the extra mile - a willingness to delight customers is what separates the best from the rest.
- Do not make assumptions - your last customer service survey (last years) is probably out of date now - keep talking to your customers. The most successful companies know they cannot afford to rest on their laurels and are always willing to try something new and learn from others.
- Learn from your mistakes - and put them right.
- Put yourself in your customer's shoes - would you be delighted by the service you receive? Would you do business with you?

## Focus on the Customer

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The Government website, Business Link, has a wealth of information for small businesses on how to:

- Improve productivity
- Improve competitiveness
- Overcome competitive threats
- Address growth issues
- Gain a complete picture of the business

You can visit the Business Link website at:  
[www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

## Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues. We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

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