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# Seven steps to high impact customer service

**A** customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us; we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so." Believe it or not, these are words that were written over a century ago by Mahatma Gandhi. And, they still ring true today.

During the past few years, based on personal observations of customer service, the foremost thought that continually comes to my mind is "mediocrity." Though we, as customers, expect good service, I am discovering that too few company employees are willing to give it.

On how many occasions, lately, have you experienced customer service that has involved unpleasant attitudes, poor phone etiquette, negative tone of voice, or reluctance to resolve your issues in a manner that ensures satisfaction and repeat and referral business? As Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton used to remind his employees, "There is only one boss — the customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else."

Ultimately, there is one major area in which a business can distinguish itself, offer added value and gain a competitive edge — superior customer service. Whatever the size or nature of the business, whatever your role in the company, you are involved in customer service. How

you react will have an effect on everything your company is trying to achieve.

Management guru Peter Drucker once said, "The purpose of a business is to retain customers." So, where do we start? Here are seven customer service tips that can help ensure your organization is providing superior service that can guarantee a high retention rate.

1. Know your customer. Understand what it is about your company that makes customers come to you instead of your competition. Identify your strengths and build upon them.

2. Know your competition. Know what your competition is doing at all times. Are they doing something new or different? Are they doing something better than you? How can you do something better than them? Always ask yourself these questions. Keep your business on top when it comes to quality of products and service.

3. Retain your customers. It can cost five to 10 times more to acquire a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. Keep your customers delighted. Treat them like gold. Remember, every customer you lose is a customer gained by your competition.

4. Create a positive first impression. The first contact your customers have with your organization is critical. Take measures to make sure that first contact is a magic moment instead of a tragic moment. In these days of shrinking profit margins, little things can make a big difference.

5. Approach complaints with a positive attitude. When you're dealing with customers on an ongoing basis, you'll undoubtedly receive your fair share of complaints. So keep in mind Al Capone's motto: "Don't take it personally, it's just business." After that, it's simply a question of approaching the problem with the right attitude to ensure customer satisfaction.

6. Sharpen your customer service skills. Customer service training is one of the most valuable tools you can give yourself or, as a manager, your staff. The skills mastered will enable everyone to become more productive, enjoy their job more, increase their value to the company and improve customer service at all levels.

7. Measure customer satisfaction. Continuously monitor your business. Never sit back and relax. Offer new products or services as customer needs require. Always ask the customer what you can do better. That information is the vital link between your business and your customers, and can help provide the kind of service satisfaction that builds customers for life.

In any business today, high impact customer service commitment must be renewed every day. We have to tend to it, we have to feed it, we have to care about it and we have to live it. When we do, that commitment translates into delighted customers, repeat business, referrals and increased profits.

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