



**LifeSolutions**

# The Successful Supervisor

August 2015

## Customer Service

*"I run a call center and I often overhear staff responding to callers in ways that concern me. How do I teach my employees to provide good customer service?" Or "My staff interact with workers from other departments. They don't seem to understand that other employees are basically our customers and need to be treated as such. Do you have any pointers on how to improve their interactions with 'in-house' customers?"*

As the last question demonstrates, good customer service skills are not only important for those who work in call centers or provide service to outside customers. Whatever our job may be, most of us are providing services to others on a regular basis. And that means we all need to have good customer service skills. No matter whom we serve or what our product is, we need to cultivate positive relationships. Positive relationships will lead our customers to want to call us back and to continue using the services we offer. This month's issue of *The Successful Supervisor* focuses on the major components of good customer service. If you have any questions or would like to share your thoughts with us, contact us at [www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com) or call us at **1-800-647-3327**.

*Rebecca M. Henke, MBA  
LifeSolutions Account Manager*

We all know from personal experiences with customer service that the quality and helpfulness of our interactions with service providers can vary greatly. We can finish an interaction feeling listened to, supported, and respected. Our needs have been met, or it is clear that every effort will be made to help us resolve our problem. Or we can hang up the phone or walk away feeling the opposite. We are no better off than when we started and we feel unheard and disrespected.

*How does this happen?* Sometimes it is a lack of skill and training ... employees do not understand the basics of customer service. They may not appreciate that co-workers are also customers. Or they may not be aware of how they come across to others. Or they may be adequately trained, but feel so overwhelmed by a busy workload that they forget to apply what they have learned. Or they think, "I will do better tomorrow when I am not so busy." As they focus on "getting the job done," they may neglect the little things that keep customers coming back ... things like listening, being empathic, and responding in a caring and friendly manner.

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### So what does constitute good customer service?

The first thing to remember is *that Individuals want and deserve to be treated with courtesy and respect at all times, especially when dealing with a difficult problem, issue, or situation.* One unhelpful response can lead to a breakdown in the service relationship. Actions such as inattentiveness, using slang or technical jargon, arguing, ignoring, dismissing the customer's emotions, or refusing to take responsibility for a problem can quickly derail the interaction. Unfortunately, this happens a lot. Consider the following. When asked:

- 60% of consumers report that their customer service experiences have been negative.\*
- 62% of consumers switched service providers due to poor customer service experiences.\*\*
- By 2020, customer service experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator.\*\*\*

\*American Express 2014 Global Customer Service Barometer

\*\*Accenture Global Consumer Pulse Survey

\*\*\*Customers 2020 Report

Shep Hyken, CSP, CPAE, customer service expert and author of *Moments of Magic*, reports that companies often set *satisfactory* customer service as their goal. He points out that *satisfactory* customer service translates to *average* customer service and *average* service is not enough to keep customers coming back. Companies and organizations that achieve "Moments of Magic" consistently elevate the customer experience above satisfactory — not just one aspect but the entire experience. The entire experience begins with the very first interaction and extends to the very last interaction. Hyken shares the following guidelines to elevate customer service experiences from *satisfactory* to "Moments of Magic":

- **Never forget that the first conversation sets the tone for the entire relationship.** Customers "like or dislike" the service provider within the first few minutes. They quickly judge the provider as helpful or unhelpful. It's critical to take the first few minutes to welcome the customer and begin to establish a friendly and professional relationship.

- **Respectfully convey knowledge and expertise.** When the service representative comes across as knowledgeable, the customer's confidence and trust increase ("this person really knows his stuff ... he can help me!"). If you don't have the answers, admit it. Let the customer know that you will either find the answer or will direct him or her to someone who can help.
- **Treat the customer as a whole person, not just a task to be managed or a complaint to be handled.** Increase rapport by taking a few minutes to ask: "How are things going today? Did you have any problems getting here?" Or "The last time we spoke, you said your son was about to graduate from high school ... how is he doing?"
- **Convey enthusiasm and engagement.** No customer wants to feel that you are bored or would rather be doing something else. Even if this is not your dream job, it is important to convey that, in this moment, you are actively engaged in working with and helping him or her.
- **Ask the extra question(s) that take the service response to the next level.** For example, if the individual says he or she would like a product delivered quickly, ask how soon. Clarify expectations and do whatever you can to meet or even exceed his or her expectations.
- **If a mistake has been made, acknowledge it.** Apologize for the inconvenience or frustration it caused the customer. Let the customer know that you will work as quickly as possible to set things right.
- **Under-promise and over-deliver.** For example, restaurant hosts know that it is better to tell a patron there will be a 45-minute wait and then seat the person in 30 minutes than to tell the patron there will be a 30-minute wait and find that 45 minutes later the customer is still not seated.
- **Create consistency across the board.** Customers should be greeted with the same level of professionalism and helpfulness no matter with whom the customer speaks. This approach increases customer confidence in your organization.

### 3 • The Successful Supervisor

- **Always thank the customer for doing business with you** or letting you know of his or her dissatisfaction with a service or product.

Shep Hyken's *Moments of Magic in Customer Service* can be viewed on demand at <http://www.hyken.com/news-media/>.

For more information or for questions regarding customer service, please contact your *LifeSolutions* Account Manager at 1-800-647-3327.

Stay tuned for our September issue, which will focus on *Stressing Less at Work: Self-Care Is the Antidote!*

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U.S. Steel Tower, 600 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

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