

# Customer Service Starts With Leadership

Management's performance is passed from employee to customer.



College, in Elgin, Ill., teaches business students the importance of employee relations. "Business is a machine and unless oiled properly, it will break down," Wilson says. Five basic rules from Wilson's lectures should shed some light on the subject.

#### Rule of Thank You

People go out of their way to encourage and uplift others. This is a basic rule to everyone in all areas of business. A simple "thank you" can uplift morale and increase productivity within the office. Good manners seem to be dead in much of the world, and simple things such as a thank you often go unheard. These are the skills that are needed to be involved in any customer service situation.

"Saying 'thank you' and 'please' and treating customers with respect may sound elementary, but those little courtesies go a long way in making customers feel appreciated," says Robert Nieminen, editor of *Customers First*, a guide that discusses how your customer service department can excel.

#### Rule of Servant to Others

Servant leaders use their power to grow their employees into leaders who then use their newly found power to make the team more successful. If we take the extra steps to take care of our employees then that will be reflected to the customers. When we give trust and responsibility to our employees they start to get a sense of pride in their job. They will pass this along to the customer who requires the same respect and politeness.

"Customers have a number of pet peeves including being misinformed, ignored or treated rudely," Nieminen explains. "Paying attention to customers and not treating them as an inconvenience is all they want. I'd venture to say that any organization that continues to ignore its customers will not be in business for long."

#### Rule of Standard

You set the standard. If employees see

those in charge working hard and going the extra mile for employees, then they will reflect that positive leadership to the public. Leading by example sometimes brings about the best results from the team. As a leader, you are watched by employees all day. They will notice the extra work or the encouraging remarks given throughout the course of the day.

#### Rule of Value

People-sensitive leaders see others as having value. A true leader realizes that the job is not done by himself but by the employee. If you realize the value of everyone working towards a common goal then you will start to see the value in each individual. Sometimes this is lost within the customer service responsibility. Don't disrespect or lessen the importance of the customer. The only reason you have a business is because of the customer. Don't forget to be thankful to them for their business.

Employees who think they have no value will not feel needed or useful. Show them they are important to the company. Management should apply this same outlook to all customers. Let them know that they are valued, the business needs them and they are appreciated.

#### Rule of Shared Value

Team effectiveness tends to increase as the team believes in the values set by the leader. The leader of a group has more power than he knows. If everyone is pushing towards the same goal then it can be achieved faster. If you show employees how important customers are then they all can work together as a team.

Can anybody go into battle without a plan? Our nation's history would have been much different if the Revolutionary War generals had no plan of attack. Such planning is needed when management envisions the company as a "team." Without a team goal or vision, what is the company working towards? If employees don't believe in the cause or goal then the leader has to find a different way

to motivate the team. Unity is the most important thing in the pursuit of the goal.

There are four important things to remember when dealing with customers: listen to the customer, ask questions, share information and inform the customer.

Nieminen says, "It's critical that businesses not only identify customers' needs but also take steps to become proactive in anticipating those need."

- **Listen to the customer.** Find out his wants and needs. You cannot help the customer without listening first.
- **Ask questions.** See how the company's service or product is performing for the customer. If management sees how business is affecting the customer, then it can make adjustments to better serve him.
- **Share information of feedback** received from customers with someone who can make changes right away. Even small alterations can change the outcome of your service.
- **Inform the customer** of any changes in the company or its policies. This will show him that the company is committed to improving and changing with the times.

If you want customers to feel important and needed, then start with the employees in charge of them. Employees are just as important as the customers are, and until you treat them with the importance they deserve, you will see a constant decline in service. Good customer service starts at the top and should spread throughout the rest of the company. Next time a customer complains about his service, maybe you should examine the leadership and not just the employee.

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#### About the Author

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**W**hen looking at the importance of customer service, first look at the treatment of the employee. Using the age-old rule of "treat others as you would like to be treated" helps demonstrate the importance of employee morale.

Most of us have dealt with customer service departments and have found that some of the employees are not very polite. Why are these employees so upset about being in customer service? Why are employees working in customer service not taught the importance of the customer?

Employees must be treated with respect and courtesy the same way you expect your customers to be treated. If employees aren't receiving the same service your customers expect, then the process is destroyed from the beginning.

Bill Wilson, former chief executive officer and current business professor at Judson

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