

# 10 WAYS TO TAKE YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE FROM DRAB TO FAB



Fab

Very Good

Average

Poor

Drab

**It happens all the time: a full-page ad in a major, monthly publication touts the service excellence of a company's product with catchy phrases and great promises.**

Companies spend major dollars to create an implied image in the mind of the consumer. But this image can vanish in a heartbeat if promises made are not promises kept, if the derived image cancels out the implied image.

The point is: We all talk about the derived image, not the glossy ad. Couple this "talk" with web chatter, and you reach thousands.

**WHY SHOULD YOU CARE WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING?**

- It costs six to eight times more to get a new customer than to keep an old one.
- There is a 12% higher profit margin with your existing customers.
- Companies that keep their existing customers enjoy a 9% higher growth rate than those that don't.
- Each customer who leaves tells at least ten people they know, and with email and Internet, they potentially tell thousands or millions.

It doesn't take much to make a negative impression. Common customer complaints include unprofessional staff, disinterested staff, bad attitudes matched with a sense of boredom, more enthusiasm for chatting with co-workers than with the customer, and an inability to solve problems.

Your employees have probably had customer service training, but perhaps you are still seeing customers leave. Why does this happen? It's because leadership didn't take the time to find out how the customer service "rules" affect the actual customer. Follow these ten tips to take your customer service from drab to fab:

**1** The single most important thing you can do to increase customer satisfaction is to treat your employees well. One disgruntled employee can easily alienate dozens of customers. Find out what is wrong and fix it.

**2** Keep employees in the loop so that they are in the know and feel like valued insiders. With the power of the Internet, your employees can find out corporate news before you do. Don't let this happen to your company. Talk to employees often, and in person.

**3** Teach employees to think of themselves as business consultants rather than employees. Empower them to make customer-pleasing decisions without having to call a supervisor.

**4** Ask employees to change their viewpoint. Have them look at all customers as multi-million dollar businesses, and treat them accordingly.

**5** Embrace new ideas and reward innovation. Seek and act on advice from your front line; most of the time, they are the only contact a customer has with your company.

**6** Recognize and reward each other. Think in 360 degrees. Managers need praise from a subordinate as much as from their boss. Encourage peer-to-peer recognition for helping each other resolve customer issues.

**7** Constantly seek innovation. Ask everyone to study the competition and find out what they do that makes them better. The front line will see what a higher-level manager will not.

**8** Seek and act on customer feedback. Assign an employee or employees to scour the Internet for both positive and negative conversations about your company.

**9** Make your current customers feel important. Offer them price cuts or coupons, make every transaction with them pleasant, communicate transparently, have a live person answer your phones, and thank customers for their business.

**10** Seek and reward referrals from current customers. A chiropractor who provides a free adjustment to any patient who refers someone else gets dozens of referrals every week, and her practice thrives, even during economic turmoil.

Don't just pay lip service to improving customer service. Good customer service is the linchpin to survival at any time, but especially during difficult times. Start by treating your employees well, keeping them in the loop, and releasing them to do what it takes to send each customer away happy.

**DBR**

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