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# What Your Customers Really Want: The Qualities Of Customer Care

by LAURIE BROWN

Most people believe that the hardest part of starting and maintaining a successful business is finding the right product or service. In reality, this is hardly ever enough; it is simply the starting point. To be truly successful, you need to see your business through your customer's eyes. What do they want and need to keep coming back to you time and again?

There are seven qualities of customer care that will take a business from the great product or service to the great company that will keep customers coming back for more. Here's what it takes to win and keep your customers.

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## Accessibility

It starts by making it easy for your customer to conduct business with you. Accessibility includes things such as ample parking, phone systems that are easy to use, returning e-mail the day it is received, and a web site that is clear and easy to navigate. It means you use language that is clear and easily understood by all. If you have diverse customers, it means translating your materials into their native language.

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## Availability

Are you there when your customers need you? Make sure that your business hours are compatible with your clients'/customers' needs. If your business takes appointments or reservations, allow your customers to make them for the same day they call you. On days when your business is closed, have a place or person your customers can go to get information. This could be a web site, a person on call, or a helpful message on your phone system. Nowadays, people seek information 24/7 — make sure that they can get what they need when they need it.

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## Affability

Everyone wants to conduct business with nice, pleasant people. Seems simple, right? But sometimes the simplest of things are the hardest to accomplish. Having to deal with the realities

of life, like traffic, arguments or just not feeling well, can make being pleasant seem impossible. However, making a point of warmly greeting your customers on the phone or in person can have an amazing impact on the success of your business. Everyone (from the janitor to the CEO) should greet customers warmly. Affability is everyone's responsibility. This will help ensure your customers get the treatment they deserve.

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## Agreeability

Customers want to hear "Yes" when they ask you for something. But how many times do you say "No" to your customers? Perhaps you hide behind policies and procedures. Do you really think it feels better when your customers hear, "No. Sorry it's our policy"?

Obviously you can't say "Yes" every time your customers ask for something. So how do you know

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when to say “Yes” without it becoming a problem? Put it through a very simple filter. If it isn’t illegal, immoral or unethical, say “Yes.”

Even if you can’t say, “Yes,” don’t say “No.” Instead, stop, take a breath and say, “Let me see what I can do.” Then do something: find a way around the issue — call a supervisor — be creative — show the customer that you are doing everything possible to accommodate them.

When you say “Yes!” you are showing your customer that you value their business and that you care about their best interests.

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### Accountability

Take ownership of your customers’ needs and issues. Let them know that you will do what it takes to make them happy. If there is a problem, be the one who gets it resolved, even if you didn’t create the problem. See it through until it’s resolved. When other people need to be involved you should still follow up to make sure that the problem was resolved successfully.

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### Adaptability

Your customers’ desires are constantly changing; make sure that you keep up. Adaptability is essential. Don’t just wait for their requests, talk to them, ask them about their experience doing business with you. What do they like about your business? What do they dislike? Then give them what they want.

More than keeping up, make sure you are exceeding your customers’ expectations. If you always provide something exceptional, they will grow to expect it, and it ceases to be exceptional. When exceptional becomes the norm, you need to figure out new ways to surprise and delight them.

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### Ability

It might seem strange that ability comes last on the list. If you do all the things described above successfully, customers will be far more willing to accept that you are not perfect. But this doesn’t mean that you don’t have to strive for continuous improvement.

Your customers are getting more and more knowledgeable. The Internet has made it easy for them to gain expertise. You need to do as much research as they do. More than ever, you need to be an expert about your products and services. Take 15 minutes out of your day and learn something new: read what your customers read; find out what others are saying about your products and services; learn about your competition.

You can truly set yourself apart from the competition when you strive for more knowledge and expertise every day.

Focusing on what is important to your customers allows you to truly set yourself apart from your competition. Strive to embody the seven qualities of customer care and create customers for life. □

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