Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service

3rd Edition

By Ron Zemke, Kristin Anderson

Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service is the best-selling frontline customer service book ever published. It delivers the strategies, techniques and tips to keep your customers happy. And as everyone knows, a happy customer is a paying customer. But extraordinary customer service brings more – a real competitive edge, a better bottom line and increased job satisfaction for your employees.

Kristen Anderson, president of Say What, Consulting, is an internationally recognized communications and customer service expert. She has co-authored four of the seven volumes of the Knock Your Socks Off series. Co-author Ron Zemke is a management consultant and researcher who has become one of the most widely quoted authorities on the subject of customer service. He’s a highly sought after keynote speaker who shares effective strategies for building great relations with customers, partners, vendors and employees.

Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service shows us how to see things from the customer’s point of view, become a fantastic fixer, a powerful problem solver and delivers the strategies, techniques, and tips that will keep customers coming back.

The Fundamental Principles Of Knock Your Socks Off Service

1. Understanding That To The Customer You Are The Company
You represent your company to the customer. There’s no separation between the two. They don’t care what your job description is - they want you to fulfill their needs and serve their purpose.

To cement this in your mind use “I” in your communications. Don’t use phrases such as “the policy is” or “the boss says we can’t do that.” By using “I” it shows you understand and acknowledge how your customers are feeling.

2. Being Reliable
According to Anderson and Zemke, this means providing what was promised, dependably and accurately. Of course, sometimes promises made in good faith can’t be kept because everything that affects your customer’s experience is not in your
control.

Take the appropriate steps when there’s a problem. The first thing you must do is apologize. Don’t waste time scapegoating, admit something has gone wrong and immediately start fixing the problem.

“You can’t promise your customers sunny weather, but you can promise to hold an umbrella over them when it rains.”

3. Being Empathetic

Ensure you understand the difference between sympathy and empathy. A sympathetic response might be, “I was really disappointed in that product’s performance too.” An empathetic response would be one that affirms and acknowledges the other’s emotional state. Instead of the above response, you could state, “I can understand why you were disappointed with this product’s performance.”

When you respond to customers with sympathy, you’re taking on their emotions and this can leave you frazzled. The trick is to be emotionally aware without being too emotionally involved. Only then are you able to be at your best to solve the customer’s problem.

4. Knowing The Deadly Sins Of Customer Service And Avoiding Them

Part of giving great service includes knowing what NOT to do. Do you remember ever making these statements or thinking these thoughts in your service encounters?

**Sins You Can Control**

A. “I don’t know.”
B. “I don’t care.”
C. “I can’t be bothered.”
D. “I don’t like you.”
E. “You don’t know anything.”
F. “Don’t come back.”
G. “I’m right and you’re wrong.”

5. Getting That The Customer is Always …. The Customer

Zemke and Anderson remind us that the customer is the reason we have our company in the first place. Knowing this helps keep the focus not on a problem, but where it belongs, on keeping the customer.

He says that to do this, you need to be sensitive to the customer’s feelings, and acknowledge that they’re human and have faults. It is a challenge, but your goal is to help them without blame or embarrassment.

He gives you three techniques to make them right. He recommends that you assume their innocence, look for the opportunities a challenge can teach you and, most of all - always believe your customer. Even if they’re mistaken, it costs you nothing to
extend them this courtesy.

The How To’s Of Knock Your Socks Off Service Include:

1. Knowing That Honesty Is The Only Policy
According to the authors, “honesty isn’t the best policy, it is the only policy.” Why? First, even little white lies catch up with you. Second, customers respect people that are honest. The third reason is that it makes you feel better about yourself and this directly affects your job performance.

2. Doing The Right Thing
Doing “the right thing” for your customer frequently requires a judgment call. We must teach our employees to apply common sense and consideration to unique situations and steer them away from hiding behind an “it’s our policy” response.

Of course, our staff may require some direction when given latitude to make decisions that can have far-reaching consequences. The authors suggest color coding your rules to make the strictness of a rule perfectly clear. For example, rules coded as red would never even be considered being broken and rules coded blue could be broken in special situations.

3. Listening Is A Skill …Use It
Most people who become good listeners work at it, it isn’t something that comes naturally. To become a more effective listener the authors first recommend that you repeat what was stated back to the customer.

Then ask questions if you are at all unclear on any of the details. Try reading back important information, (for example addresses, phone numbers, web or email addresses). This will reassure your customers that you understand what they want, are in a position to fulfill their requests and everything will go smoothly.

4. Asking Intelligent Questions
The authors suggest that you need to act like a good detective and ask lots of questions. They suggest you ask three types of questions to help you fulfill the needs of your customers.

1. Background questions: These are basic questions that give you facts about your customer. By asking these general questions you’ll be able to judge if you can meet this customer’s needs, or if someone else would be able to serve them better.

2. Probing questions: These are open-ended questions that dig for details. Avoid closed questions that can be answered with a yes or no, as these won’t provide very much information.

3. Confirmation questions: This type of question is basically a restatement of the customer’s request. However by restating it as a question instead of a statement, you get a reply from the customer, which will confirm that their
needs have been understood.

5. Using Winning Words And Soothing Phrases

Certain words or phrases can create an instant negative response from your customer. Saying such things as “I don’t know,” “That is against our policy,” or “No, that isn’t acceptable,” will only further aggravate an upset customer.

Instead use comments such as these: “I am not aware of the answer to that, but I will find out for you right away.” “We cannot give a cash refund, but we can find a product that may better suit your needs.” “I can see why this was a problem for you, let me see what we can do to correct it.”

6. Facts For Face To Face

When we’re face to face with customers we communicate with more than our words. Messages are sent through non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, posture, gestures and eye contact. When we make eye contact we let the customer know that we see them, that we are paying attention. An overall appearance of cleanliness and neatness communicates competence and we make people feel comfortable by staying in the “comfort zone,” i.e. maintaining an appropriate distance during a conversation which is about a foot and a half or two feet.

Non-verbal cues account for at least 70 percent of what is communicated so we must pay attention to not only what we say, but how we say it so we can effectively communicate and deliver a positive service experience.

7. Tips For Telephone Talk

Unlike face to face interactions where the customer can see your posture, gestures and facial expressions, customers on the phone get their entire impression of you strictly from the words you speak and the tone and quality of your voice. How effective is your telephone style?

• Does your voice show enthusiasm and interest in what you’re doing, or are you coming across as someone using a script?
• Do you answer the phone quickly and courteously?
• Do you identify yourself to the caller?
• How are transfers handled? Do you give your customer the name and phone number of the person you are transferring them to in case of a problem?
• Are messages handled in a proficient and professional way?
• When you have to put a customer on hold do you always ask their permission? (If a customer does not want to be put on hold, offer to take their number and call them back.)
• When using voicemail do you: tell callers the exact information you want them to leave (phone number, customer id. etc.) and explain the details of your particular system? For example, “Please leave your message after the beep, press the # key and hang up when your message is finished.”
And, do you check your own voicemail message regularly to ensure it is appropriate?

8. Putting Your Best E-Mail Foot Forward
Remember that email used for business purposes should have a business-like tone. Don’t treat customers like old friends unless they are.
Respond promptly. The standard time to reply to business emails is 8 hours or less. If you don’t respond the same day, an acknowledgement of receipt should be sent telling the customer when to expect a reply.

9. Good Selling Is Good Service - Good Service Is Good Selling
Anderson and Zemke emphasize that in today’s economy, sales and service people need to work as a team. For example, if you’re a repair technician and your job doesn’t remotely involve selling, you still need to be part of the sales team. You do this by listening to the customer and asking questions that can uncover needs that customer wasn’t aware of. This allows you to sell more and ultimately be of more service to your customer.
However, Zemke and Anderson suggest that there are three instances when selling is not good service. These would be when there are no other alternatives, when a customer is so angry that he gives you no slack, or when an upgrade would be totally unrelated or inappropriate.

10. Never Underestimate The Value Of A Sincere Thank-You
The authors say that in today’s business market, it’s more important than ever to thank your customers for the business they give you – it is a gift. Here are some specific examples of when you should be sure to thank your customer.
   1. Each and every time they do business with you. Don’t take regular customers for granted.
   2. When a customer takes the time to give feedback, take the time to give a sincere Thank You for their efforts. Using eye contact and a smile, combined with a sincere Thank You for feedback, will do wonders for your customer’s loyalty.
   3. Be sure and say Thank You to your customers when they try a new product. It takes courage to try something new. Your customer deserves appreciation for taking that action.
   4. The authors suggest giving a written thank you or a token gift when a customer refers your business to a friend or associate.
   5. It’s very important to thank customers when they’ve been waiting. A simple acknowledgement that you appreciate their patience works wonders in diffusing what could become an irate customer.
   6. If your customers make it easier for you to serve them, by having their information available and always keeping records of your service to them, let them know this is appreciated. A compliment goes a long way.
7. Even thank your customers for complaining. Customers who tell you they are unhappy are giving you the gift of a second chance. Thank them for this gift.

8. Be sure and thank them, when they make you smile. “A smile is one of the greatest gifts you can give.”

There are so many ways to say thank you. You can say it verbally, in writing or with a gift of some type. When you say it, make it warm and personal. A customer can tell when you are saying it in a robot-like way, as if you have been trained to say it after every transaction. You can also write a personal note at the bottom of a bill, or in an email. Avoid form letters, and a letter in the mail is often appreciated even more than an email. A small gift will also help that customer remember your business.

**Conclusion**

More than a decade after the debut of *Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service*, this latest edition helps you become a real asset to your company by teaching you how to provide service customers will remember and value. Because today’s customer is smarter, more demanding, and more mobile than ever, employ these strategies, techniques, and tips to ensure those customers keep coming back.