

SELLING POINTS

It starts with a smile – but it doesn't end there

Exceptional customer service is the result of a few basic concepts carried out consistently and well. Here are some of the most fundamental things to remember as you engage your customers:

- **SMILE** – Something that costs nothing but evokes such a positive response should be a requirement for every employee. If an applicant doesn't smile at the interview, they cannot be trained to have a genuine smile on the job.

- **LISTEN** – Be slow to speak and quick to listen. Let customers express themselves without trying to do it for them. Nobody likes being interrupted.

- **PHONE ETIQUETTE** – Whether you are answering or initiating a call, always remember who the customer is. Be polite. Use "yes sir/ma'am" instead of "yeah" and "nope." If you don't have a ready answer for your customer, offer to do some research and get back to them.

- **THANK YOU** – Always thank your customers, even if you weren't able to help them or they decided not to purchase from you. Leave them with a positive impression of you and your business.

- **TRAINING** – Train your employees. Don't let an untrained, unprepared employee ruin your track record of excellent customer service. Train your employees on-the-job for as long as necessary to teach them good customer service. Offer regular training even for experienced employees to remind them of the basics.

Compassionate nurses offer prescription for great service

by *Connie Brubaker*

On June 14, 2006, my sister Barbara, 25 weeks pregnant, gave birth to a 1 lb., 5 oz. baby girl.

The emergency caesarian section followed a week of unsuccessfully trying to control Barbara's dangerously escalating blood pressure. Her doctors finally decided that the best course of action for mother and daughter was the c-section.



Connie's Comments

Although my niece, Ashlee Nicole, is still in critical condition, she continues to improve and now weighs over 2 pounds.

Needless to say, during the past month I've sat for countless hours in waiting and hospital rooms. And I've had the opportunity to observe first-hand the attitudes of the many nurses who have tended to both Barbara and Ashlee.

What I've seen has been impressive. It's clear that there is a real culture of commitment here, with these frontline health care providers exhibiting both pride in their work and compassion for the patients and their families.

I noted that when a nurse smiles, touches a patient, calls them by name, really listens and expresses empathy, the patient feels truly cared for as a person, not just an insurance number.

Believe it or not, those simple actions can dramatically affect how a patient views the whole hospital experience, significantly increasing goodwill and building customer loyalty.

Employers in a wide range of industries generally require customer service representatives to be cheerful, friendly and, if need be, sympathetic in order to increase customer satisfaction. They are also expected to control, suppress or otherwise mask their own



emotions in the interests of professionalism.

Taken to an extreme in very stressful jobs, that kind of suppression day

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Benefit-oriented employees primed to offer great service

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after day can cause emotional exhaustion, even burnout. The resulting turnover rates and recruitment costs — within just the health care industry — are staggering.

Research by Accenture on “The Mechanics and Costs of Emotional Labor” suggest that employees control their on-the-job emotions in 3 ways:

1. **Suppression** – Hiding irritation at a demanding customer, for instance.
2. **Surface Acting** – Actively faking emotions, such as plastering on a smile

and feigning friendliness while feeling irritated on the inside.

3. **Deep Acting** – Actually trying to change your internal mood to match the job’s requirements. For example, an employee who arrives in a bad mood might spend a few minutes thinking happy thoughts or chatting with a co-worker in order to actually feel cheerful and helpful.

Emotional strain is also caused by feelings of dishonesty. If your employees don’t feel like they’re providing a genuine service, you may see increased incidents of emotional exhaustion, physical complaints, job dissatisfaction and, ultimately, disengagement.

During *The Customer*[®] customer service training, we spend time focusing on how a company’s products and services do benefit customers or patients. We also help each employee

identify their personal, unique contribution. When employees are reminded of the good they do, it helps re-energize their interest in their job, their company and their customers.

My other sister, Sue, has been a labor and delivery nurse in Gulfport, MS, for 25 years. She too was reminded of the importance of the personal touch after watching other nurses treat Barbara. She rededicated herself to showing compassion to every patient. She later told me that the very next mother she helped deliver was so appreciative of her care that she sent Sue a gift certificate and cheesecake — what wonderful validation and reinforcement!

The personal touch can make a real difference in customer satisfaction — not just for hospitals, but for virtually every business, every industry and every office.

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Connie Brubaker is a certified Integrity Systems[®] business consultant and professional speaker who focuses on sales, customer service and leadership.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“A man who cannot smile should not open a shop.”

— Old Chinese proverb