

# 4 TIPS TO TURN SATISFIED CUSTOMERS INTO LOYAL CUSTOMERS

BY BILL HOGG

*This is our final article in the series of six articles dealing with different aspects of excellent customer service and how it leads to an increase in your overall profitability. It is now available for download as a White Paper at [www.BillHogg.ca](http://www.BillHogg.ca).*

If you have been following along, we have focused on a number of elements of the customer service experience that lead towards building stronger -- more profitable -- customer relationships.

Every single interaction with a customer affects your business. Whether it is positive, neutral or negative, the goal is to build a loyal relationship so they return again and again to spend their money with your business -- and tell their friends. This leads to greater profitability. The loyal customer is the ideal customer and all employees should be focused on building loyalty at every opportunity.

In this article we're going to cover a few key ways to turn customers who are satisfied into those loyal customers who are responsible for most of your company's income. Loyal customers mean more profitability for the company and stronger job security for the employees. Customer loyalty literally pays the wages so taking active steps to turn satisfied customers into long-term loyal ones is in everyone's best interests.

## **Actively solicit customer input**

How many companies demonstrate an interest in what their customers want to see happening in the store? Regular customers may surprise you with ideas that are really good. Of course there are bound to be some that are impractical. But why not ask them what they would like? Tap into them as a vital resource.

There are different ways to get customer input. One method would be to have a suggestion box in a prominent place. Another would be to have a section on your website that enables customers to provide feedback for you to act upon.

Although many businesses can use a similar technique, we'll use a restaurant as an example. As patrons get up to pay their bill, many restaurants ask "*was everything ok...*" only to receive a curt "*yes*" as the patron rushes out the door. A better way to handle this would be to ask them *what you could have done to improve their dining experience*.

This type of question signals that you are interested in hearing what they have to say and encourages customers to provide feedback on how you can improve -- versus just hearing from customers who want to complain.

It's essential that you take action based on the feedback provided and you could even give that customer a \$10 voucher to use on their next visit so they can see for themselves that you have listened and taken action.

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## **Treat every customer like pure gold**

Every customer that walks through your door is a chance for you to make a good impression and create a loyal customer. But how do you do this? You have to “read” each customer because they’re all different. Watch their body language. Do they come in and demand immediate attention or do they want to browse first?

We all experience that salesperson that comes up and offers help and if you don’t need it, they stand there like a vulture, watching and waiting. Let them browse if that’s what they want. When they want help, they’ll ask for it. Once you have made yourself available, step back and give them space.

It’s essential that you provide the service they need without being too pushy. You can actually drive them out the door if you push too hard. Once they ask for your assistance, then it’s time to shine. You want to make their customer service experience a positive one so they’ll come back again and again.

Try to personalize each customer interaction to suit the specific customer. If they’re chatty, have a brief chat with them while helping them. If they prefer to simply pay for their goods, handle them courteously and professionally so they can get on with the rest of their day.

Anticipate and meet their needs on every level and they will have no reason to go elsewhere. If you exceed their customer service expectations, they’re well on the way to becoming loyal customers.

## **Look for Small Ways to Exceed Expectations**

In many cases, your products or services may be similar or identical to those of your competitors. If that’s the case, you have to find the small things that will differentiate your experience and add up to an outstanding customer service experiences that not only inspires satisfaction but loyalty too.

Some examples can include: ordering in items that you may not normally stock, carrying heavy items out to the customer’s car, providing a delivery service, offering a free gift wrapping service, ensuring your store registers are always open when the queues build up and being a little flexible in your hours of operation if circumstances dictate.

Customers see these little things as big to them although they may seem insignificant to your overall business. If you’re doing all the extra things that your competitors don’t care enough to do themselves, you’re sure to stand out as a business that **really cares** for its customers in every possible way.

## **Build relationships**

Everyone likes to hear their name used by other people, whether they realize it or not. Employees should get to know customers and use their name (if appropriate) whenever possible. This creates a relationship that is a little more than just an employee/customer relationship.

If your team greets people by name whenever they enter the store, the customer will feel welcomed and be more inclined to keep coming back. Obviously this isn’t always possible but it’s definitely easier to do than people think, especially if the same customers keep on coming back.

If you keep a database of your customers, you can send them promotional material and discount information on a regular basis. While this may not be a new idea, you can add another function to your database. Utilize it as a reminder service and send out birthday cards to your customers, letting them know that you do care. Make sure the card is handwritten so it’s personal. Perhaps you can include a small gift card or voucher to honour their loyalty and encourage a return visit. This sort of touch lets them know you care.

## **Conclusion**

We have covered a lot of different aspects of customer service in this series. Everything is important when dealing with customers, even if it may not seem that way at the time. Loyalty means everything to the longevity of the company and employees must be trained to have “big picture thinking.”

Without customers, your business would cease to exist and so it's critical you do everything in your power to ensure that every single customer gets the best treatment, no matter what they need.

It's not enough to merely satisfy your customers -- you can't differentiate yourself by simply providing that basic level of service. You need to work smarter to build loyalty.

And remember, make them unhappy, even once, and your competition will be glad you did.

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