



# DELIVERING A CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THAT ROCKS

6 PART SERIES THAT INVESTIGATES  
SOME OF THE FUNDAMENTALS NECESSARY  
TO DELIVER A DIFFERENTIATED  
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



PRESENTED BY BILL HOGG AND ASSOCIATES



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4 ESSENTIALS EVERY EMPLOYEE NEEDS TO DELIVER  
EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

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WHY EMPLOYEES NEED GUIDELINES NOT JUST RULES

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*In this white paper, we'll discuss techniques that you can implement to improve the customer service performance of your employees – always with an eye firmly fixed on improved profitability*

*The content is based on six articles that were written for my monthly e-zine, where we examined different aspects of delivering exceptional customer service and how it leads to increased overall profitability.*



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# 4 ESSENTIALS EVERY EMPLOYEE NEEDS TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

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*Every employee needs to demonstrate 4 key elements before they can provide superior customer service to the people they come into contact with on a daily basis, whether it's on the telephone or in person.*

## **ATTITUDE IS THE KEY**

A positive attitude cannot be taught – it is part of our hard-wiring. Employees need the right attitude when they're at work because a negative attitude is like a cancer that spreads quickly. A positive attitude can also spread quickly but that's a good thing.

Your attitude affects the work you do and your relationship with fellow workers, customers and management. If your attitude is bad, then you're not going to do well in any service environment.

Don't let other people's bad attitude rub off on you either. It's easy to let it happen if they're particularly loud or overbearing. Keep things light and you'll reap positive rewards, maybe not today, but down the track.

Customer service is a people business. Some of them may be angry or upset, but it is our job to deal with those emotions. Keeping a positive helpful attitude will help.

## **EMPATHY**

To help customers get what they want; we first need to empathize with them – to put ourselves in their shoes to better understand what they want. We need to treat every customer as an individual instead of a number. We need to treat every customer as if they were the only one for the day.

You may have dealt with 30 customers before this one but they don't know that. Nor do they need to know it because it's not their concern.

Show them you care about their problem; that you are there to help them achieve a successful outcome for themselves. Without this key characteristic, an employee can never be taught how to provide exceptional customer service.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Regardless of who is at fault concerning a customer issue – if anyone – each employee must accept accountability to deal with the issue. Customers don't care who made the mistake – they simply want things fixed or their problem solved.

Accountability isn't about blame; it's about finding resolution for a customer who is unhappy with your product or service. Often a simple apology on behalf of the organization if the customer is unhappy will start the process of customer recovery – then the employee can take action to correct the situation.

As the representative of the organization, the customer is counting on each employee to make things right. Even if the employee can't personally resolve the issue, they should be able to make sure the customer gets to speak to the person who can.

## **PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING**

The first thing all employees must have before they interact with your customer is the appropriate on-boarding training and product knowledge. It doesn't matter if they've worked for a similar company or industry before, they're now representing your business – and resultant, should do things in a manner that reflects your values.

Employees must have the necessary training material/manuals so they can do their job properly. But it's not enough to simply hand them a book and send them out to do battle. You have to go through the material with them so they gain an understanding of what to do – and also why they do it.

“What” to do is the rational side of the equation. The technical on-boarding may take a few hours or a few weeks, depending on the nature of the job. Some roles require on-the-job training and that's fine – but everyone should know where to find information if they need it,



quickly and efficiently, so customers aren't kept waiting and are only given the correct information.

The other side of the equation is “why” – the emotional side. The emotional on-boarding may require more time and ongoing reinforcement and should build on the attitude that was identified during the hiring process. Spending time with co-workers who demonstrate the brand values through their behaviours is also essential – as are the stories that are shared across the organization about how we treat one another and our customers.

*Understanding the values that informed your decisions when you developed your branded customer experience is often more*

*important than simply knowing the process – because it ensures the employee starts to think like you and understand what motivates the organization.*

*Without this emotional connection with your organization – they will only follow direction and will never become a true ambassador for your organization. Only once these values are ingrained, will employees treat all customers in a manner consistent with your organizational values.*

*Keep these 4 things in mind when thinking about potential employees. The first 3 are essential elements of their character and the fourth is your responsibility. Without these 4 key elements, you will never have a strong customer service culture in your organization.*

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# WHY EMPLOYEES NEED GUIDELINES NOT JUST RULES

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*Once we have the foundations of a strong customer-focused employee in place, we need to continue to build on the on-boarding training they receive.*

*Rules are an essential part of any business. Rules are necessary to ensure we make intentional decisions. Rules are written to make sure people are treated equally and consistently.*

*While there's nothing wrong with this in principle, there are always going to be situations where a certain degree of flexibility is essential because people are unique. The way they react to situations is also unique and if you're trying to offer great customer service, you have to be flexible enough to respond to their needs.*

*So, apart from rules that tell an employee what they can or can't do, it's also essential that employees have guidelines as well. These guidelines will provide the boundaries that allow your employees to make decisions for the benefit of the customer – and the organization – without having to seek a supervisor's approval every time.*

*Guidelines enable employees to exercise personal judgment which may mean all the difference between retaining and losing a customer. Customer satisfaction often leads to loyalty which greatly improves the company's overall profitability.*

*It's impossible to make rules to govern every possible scenario that may occur. When dealing with customers, situations will arise where an employee may have to use some initiative to solve a problem but they can't do that if there's no latitude with regards to the rules they have to follow.*

### **EMPOWER YOUR FRONT LINE**

It's essential that customer service staff are empowered with a certain level of authority. It's pointless if they have to check with a supervisor before making every little decision.

While a company may have a strict policy of no refunds or exchanges without a receipt, there may be times when it's impractical for the customer to provide one. If a



strict policy applies and there's no flexibility to allow the employee to use their discretion and bend the rules in such a circumstance, they may lose that client and everyone they choose to tell. However, if a refund, exchange or gift card is granted, the customer would be happy and word of mouth would be positive.

### **COMMON SENSE SHOULD PREVAIL**

Employers should respect and trust their staff to make decisions based on their merit. Often it's these types of quick decisions that will mean the difference between keeping or losing a customer. There are plenty of examples where guidelines would be more appropriate.

If meals are late in a restaurant, offering a bread basket or some free drinks may quell the customer's frustration. A heartfelt apology would also be appropriate. There are times when things don't run smoothly. Perhaps even a discount on their total bill may be necessary and the front-of-house staff need to have the autonomy to do what is necessary.

Restaurants regularly replace spilled drinks; their rules might indicate no free drinks but they replace a spilled drink because that's good customer service. The drink doesn't cost much but is worth much more than the cost in positive customer response.

In any customer-focused organization, we must look at the situation from the customer's perspective to discover an appropriate solution. Often, asking the customer what they feel would be an appropriate solution will provide some direction. Experience tells us that when asked, a customer often expects far less that we would be prepared to give to remedy a situation – so it make sense to ask.

### **CUT THE SCRIPTED RESPONSES**

Have you faced the situation, whether on the phone or in a retail store, of asking questions and receiving responses from staff members that are robotic or scripted? If you ask a question they don't know how to answer, do they seem stuck or confused? Do they just repeat what you have already been told or give you information you never asked for?

If the problem doesn't have a "cookie cutter" response, they can become lost. This is because their training hasn't prepared or empowered them to think for themselves.

Staff should be trained to handle customer service enquiries and provided with specific language that you would like to see used. But not all scenarios can possibly be covered during this training. Although many of their problems are similar, customers and their expectations are unique – so you can't treat everyone the same way. It's up to the employer and staff to realize there's an unknown human element to dealing with people.

*It's imperative that staff understand the rules but they should be allowed to use their initiative where possible – within the agreed guidelines. Most problems can be solved if someone demonstrates they care enough to understand the issue and look for a solution; even if it requires a slight adjustment of the rules, but still within company guidelines.*

*Without rules, chaos would govern the workplace. There's no doubt about that. However, management must trust their staff enough to establish guidelines with a degree of autonomy/flexibility when it comes to making decisions in the workplace.*

*When customer service staff takes the initiative, ask a few sensible questions and pay attention to the answers, more problems get solved and more customers leave happier.*



# 4 STEPS TO GIVE EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

*When customers are positively engaged, they're more likely to be satisfied. Satisfaction can become loyalty and this leads to overall increased profitability.*

*Each and every person in your organization has the opportunity to create a positive impression on your customers – to impact their experience and potentially convert them from a lukewarm satisfied customer to a red-hot loyal customer.*

*From full and properly stocked shelves, to offering a friendly smile, or guiding a customer to a sought after product, the way you treat your customers will determine whether they return, or move on to the competition.*

*Exceptional Customer Service is always about the customer – it's understanding and responding to their needs – making them feel special.*

*Here is a simple 4-step formula to help employees remember how to GIVE exceptional customer service each and every time they interact with customers.*

*These guidelines work whether you are dealing with a customer for the first time or whether it is a repeat visit. They also work well when dealing with a customer complaint.*

## **GREET**

Greet every customer with a smile, make eye contact. This lets them know you see them and are ready to help. Asking “how may I help” rather than waiting for people to approach will create a positive experience. Greet your customers in a friendly and approachable manner and adjust your tone according to their needs – your greeting would be different for a customer asking for information versus one who might have a problem and is a bit upset.

In every case, you want to let the customer know that you are ready to listen and respond to their needs – and help build long-term loyalty.

## **INTERACT**

Listen carefully to each customer's request. Are they looking for help? Do they have a complaint? Be careful not to jump to conclusions about their needs, and never take their comments personally. Remember, customers often don't express their needs clearly and ask their real question. So make sure you listen for the real question behind the question.

Choose your attitude – be courteous, friendly and polite. A positive, caring attitude will sooth even the angriest customer and will turn a satisfied customer into a red-hot loyalist. Help them – make it easy for them to accomplish their outcome faster, easier and more conveniently – and you will create long-term loyalty.

## **VERIFY**

After you have listened to understand their needs, make sure your actions address their opportunity or concern? It is often a good idea to confirm with them what you have heard and then whether the solution you propose will address their need – before taking action. For example, if they ask your closing time – what they might really want to know is “what the latest time they can receive service”. Or if their preferred brand is not available, you could ask how often they would be purchasing, and potentially offer to order the product for them.

Little will be accomplished by rushing an answer or hurrying off to solve an issue they don't have. There is little value in taking action that the customer doesn't need.

## **EXPRESS THANKS**

Always say “thank you” – it makes all the difference. Customers often express thanks when they receive help from a sales person or change from a cashier, but it really



should be your team expressing thanks to your customers for their business. Letting your customer know their business is appreciated is an essential part of making them feel welcome and valued.

*No two customers are ever alike, so train your staff to follow these 4 simple steps to GIVE exceptional customer service: **Greet, Interact, Verify and Express Thanks.***

*Plus it's a lot more fun talking with people and sharing in their positive experience than standing around counting the minutes until your shift ends.*

*Remember; without customers we have no business – without repeat customers we are out of business!*

*You can download your own FREE GIVE Poster today at <http://www.billhogg.ca/resources/tools-handouts/> !*

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## 3 REASONS WHY CUSTOMER SERVICE SHOULD EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

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*Now we want to go over some of the key reasons why it is so important that customer service should be exceptional – to exceed expectations.*

*If customers are receiving exceptional customer service, they would naturally have a tendency to return to the same store again to fulfil future needs. Although the customer may only spend a small amount in any given transaction, their loyalty is potentially worth thousands of dollars in profits to the company – which helps secure future employment for the team.*

*Therefore, exceeding customer's expectations is in the best interest of all employees at all times. Here are 3 key reasons why investing in exceptional customer service is an investment in your long term success.*

### **DIFFERENTIATES YOU FROM YOUR COMPETITION**

Customer service should exceed expectations because it may be the only factor that separates you from your competitors. Your products and prices may be the same. Your hours of operation and location may be the same. The quality of your products may also be the same. So it's

the things you do differently that will make you stand out from other businesses in the eyes of your customers.

Be different in as many positive ways as possible. Be memorable for the right reasons. Your team should be cheerful when dealing with all customers, no matter what sort of day they have had. Handle customer complaints in a positive manner. Make the effort to go the extra mile at every opportunity so people are more than satisfied with your service. They are so delighted with your service experience that they wouldn't dream of going elsewhere.

### **CREATES LOYAL CUSTOMERS**

Your end goal should be to gain as many loyal customers as possible because they're priceless. Exceeding their expectations on a regular basis is the best way to satisfy them and retain their loyalty. Customers don't want the stress of looking for new places to shop. If you provide excellent customer service at every opportunity, they're more likely to keep coming back because you're making life easier for them.

Loyal customers are much easier to service because they're more forgiving if there are the occasional problems



because generally they're satisfied with your service. It's five times harder to win a new customer than it is to service your existing customer base so it's essential that your team builds long-lasting relationships with your customers so they do remain loyal.

It's easy to become complacent when dealing with loyal customers if they're simply coming in and spending their money. It's vital that your team remain ever-vigilant to customer needs.

### **WORD OF MOUTH IS POWERFUL**

If your customer service experience exceeds expectations, that's a powerful reason for customers to tell family and friends about your company's service. People trust personal recommendations and are more likely to try a new business rather than go through the stress of shopping around for better prices.

If the new customers are equally impressed with your service, they're also more likely to refer you to their friends and so it continues like a domino effect, thereby increasing your profitability even more without excessive additional expenses.

Even if you have a situation when a problem arises, this can be turned into an exceptional experience. This gives your team the opportunity to really demonstrate your service experience by the careful handling of the situation (more on this in our next segment) and a positive result for the customer. Even then, any word of mouth advertising is bound to be positive.

Word of mouth is the cheapest, yet most powerful form of advertising available. The faster it spreads, the better it is for your business.

People will talk about your service experience – so it is important that the conversation is positive.

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# 5 STEPS TO TURN A NEGATIVE INTO A POSITIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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*We covered a few of the reasons why customer service should be better than expected – but what happens when we fail to deliver an exceptional experience.*

*A negative experience often means the customer goes elsewhere with their business – and often they tell their friends. So each lost customer means more than just their lost business, but it results in lost business from their friends as well.*

*However, research also tells us that if we are able to recover from a poor experience – then customer loyalty actually increases. So if you can turn a negative experience into a positive one – that can lead to loyal customers and increased profits for the company.*

*In this segment, we will cover 5 methods for turning a*

*negative into a positive customer service outcome and helping to keep customers in the process. Customer retention is vital. It's far easier and cheaper to retain customers than to find new ones.*

### **REMAIN CALM**

If an employee is confronted with an angry or upset customer, they should let the customer vent to express their frustration. No one is rational when they have pent up anger and emotion. Remind employees that the customer is angry at the company and not them as an individual – they're simply the person in the position of handling the complaint. If an employee took every complaint personally, they wouldn't survive long in the job.





Once the irate customer has expressed their frustration and calmed down, the employee can ask questions and determine the actual problem. Listen to the real concerns because part of complaint handling is giving the customer the chance to express themselves. Then training can kick in and the problem solving techniques will be put to good use to ensure that whatever the concern, the customer leaves the store satisfied because proper action has been taken to rectify the problem.

### **EMPATHIZE**

The employee can diffuse the situation by showing the customer they're "on their side" and want to help. Sincerity is the key. The customer should feel the employee is there to help instead of arguing or disagreeing with what has been said.

Avoid typical phrases such as "it's company policy" or "I can't do that" because they're negative and will only inflame the situation. Calming phrases such as "Can you tell me exactly what happened?" or "I appreciate your frustration and I am here to help" will go a long way towards winning the customer's trust.

Lastly, don't be afraid to say you are sorry for the way they are feeling or their experience. "I'm sorry to hear about your bad experience – what can we do to make it right" is totally different than apologizing because the employee themselves made a mistake.

### **EVALUATE**

Review the situation objectively. Ask the customer what would satisfy them and determine the best course of action. Talk through different options if there is more than one to choose from and let the customer provide input on what they want to happen.

In these situations, it's critical that the employee can think "outside the box" as not all complaints fall within company policy. However, there are often solutions that

can be solved by using guidelines that satisfy the customer's needs and still allow the employee to follow correct procedures to avoid possible future problems.

### **TAKE ACTION**

Once the optimal solution has been determined, the employee should advise the customer what steps need to be taken to implement that solution. It may be easy to do or it could mean a few different steps need to be taken to ensure the problem is rectified completely.

It's essential that your team look for every opportunity to exceed a customer's expectations. It's one thing to merely satisfy their current problem but if you can take things a step further, the customer will not only be satisfied but may convert to being a loyal customer because their problem was addressed professionally and promptly.

### **CHECK BACK/VERIFY**

It's not enough to just put steps in motion to satisfy a customer. It's vital that those steps be followed up and your team should ensure that everything has been done the way they promised. Actions may need to happen in other departments or places beyond their control and so follow up may be necessary.

Contact the customer once everything has been taken care of and verify that they're satisfied with the final outcome. Express appreciation for bringing their complaint back to your company so you had the opportunity to fix the problem.

*You should always be looking to go the extra mile for the customer to keep them happy. It may not always work but the effort will often be appreciated. It will help turn the negative experience into a positive one with a hopefully happy ending.*

*Finally, remember to always thank them for their business and for allowing you to help. After all, they are the customer.*



# 4 TIPS TO TURN SATISFIED CUSTOMERS INTO LOYAL CUSTOMERS

*Thus far 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 segment 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 could you 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.

## 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.

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# CONCLUSION

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*We have covered a lot of different aspects of customer service in this white paper. 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.*





# BILL HOGG

## PERFORMANCE EXCELERATOR™

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Bill is recognized as the *Performance Excelerator*™ because of his uncanny ability to create profound change and deliver extraordinary results with the most demanding organizations.

He works with senior leaders to inspire and develop high performance teams that create long-term, profitable relationships with your customers and accelerate performance and productivity with leaders and employees.

As a senior executive with over 30 years experience, he has worked with national and international clients that include; The Bay, Canadian National Exhibition, InBev (world's largest brewer – owners of Labatt, Anheuser Busch and brands such as Bass, Becks and Stella Artois), Lever Canada, Lexus automobiles, McNeil Consumer Products, Ontario Place, Procter & Gamble, State Farm Insurance and the Province of Ontario.

Bill is passionate about results and works only with clients who share that passion – ready to take steps to achieve immediate, significant and continuous improvement. By drawing on real-life experience, his message is inherently credible and incorporates practical applications that change attitudes and behaviours.

Whether working with boards or operations teams and employees, his no-excuse approach breaks down the silos and gains consensus and clarity throughout the organization – which inspires behaviour change and ultimately drives transformation across the organization.

Bill provides dynamic keynote presentations, transformative workshops, and world-class executive consulting.

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