

Customer Care: Nordstrom Service for Walmart Resources

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PRACTICAL TIPS WHEN THERE IS A PROBLEM:

- A. Remember to breathe—our first instinct is to tighten up.
- B. Don't take it personally—even if the person is argumentative, do not engage in an argument.
- C. Don't make assumptions about the issue—listen.
- D. Apologize for the hassle/inconvenience/wrong information and mean it. An apology can go a long way. It doesn't have to be remorse that you did anything wrong, just that you are sorry the customer is frustrated, received wrong information, etc.
- E. If you can't take ownership and resolve the problem yourself, follow up with the person who ultimately handled the problem to make sure it was resolved.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A HIGH STANDARD OF CUSTOMER CARE:

- A. Responding in a timely manner (if only to say “I don’t have the answer but I will get back to you.”)
- B. Listening to the customer to identify the issue; sometimes you have to extrapolate what they are really seeking (unarticulated wants)
- C. Anticipating the customers’ needs and meeting or exceeding them (*e.g.*, Disney delivery with ride/show lines)
- D. Maintaining a positive experience for the customer even if the outcome is not exactly what they want
- E. Recognizing and accepting that some situations will be no-win; there isn’t anything more that can be done and the customer will still be dissatisfied.
- F. Making a good effort to deliver customer service—customers can recognize effort and usually are appreciative. Conversely, they can tell when you aren’t really trying.
- G. Consistently delivering customer care—make sure all staff buy into the concept that customer service is not lip service.

CUSTOMER SERVICE MATRIX

Service	Customer			
	Needs	Wants	Stereotypes	Emotions
Walt Disney World Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Lasting memories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disney is for kids • Long lines • Clean • Friendly • Expensive • Fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement entering the park • Tired feet at the end of the day • Thrill of Space Mountain
CLE Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality • Timely/relevant • Certainty • Convenience/ease • Reliability • Cost effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Quality varies • Burden/mandatory • Time consuming • Requires time out of office • Disengaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boring • Waste of time • Restrained • Friendly/cordial
Your Shop				

Adapted from, *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, Disney Institute (2001).

THE “FLIGHT ATTENDANT SPECIAL” BY RON ROSENBERG

The “Flight Attendant Special” American Airlines Flight 4716, New York City to Raleigh

I had to make an unexpected trip to New York City last week. My mother had a very bad infection and had to be admitted to the hospital. It was actually touch and go for a few days before the IV antibiotics finally kicked in. Thankfully, she’s out of the hospital now, and is recovering nicely.

After three days of hospital vigil, I was heading back home, both physically and emotionally drained. The flights between Raleigh and LaGuardia Airport are on small regional jets. And because I had to book these tickets at the last minute, I didn’t get my customary, roomy exit-row seat.

So there I am, fatigued and cramped into a small seat on a small plane. I knew it was going to be a long two hours when the person in front of me reclined his seat all the way, nearly breaking the screen on my laptop computer.

Then, after we were airborne, things started to look up as the lone flight attendant on the flight came on the PA system to tell us about the beverage service.

“Welcome aboard American Airlines Flight 4716 with non-stop service to the Raleigh-Durham International Airport. I’m not going to bring the beverage cart down the aisle because we’re expecting some choppy air along the way, and the cart is a little tricky to put away when it’s bumpy. Besides, I think that wheeling a big metal cart down the aisle is kind of impersonal, so here’s what we’re going to do today:

Since most people order water or Diet Coke, I’m going to bring those out first. Then I’m going to bring my “Flight Attendant Special,” which is cranapple juice, orange juice, and ginger ale.”

I had to wait a bit since I was sitting somewhere in the middle of the plane, but I’ll tell you, that flight-attendant special was actually quite good! And, as an unexpected bonus, she served it on a paper napkin on which she had hand-written: “Enjoy your drink! – Lynn” – not just for me, mind you, she did this for every passenger she served on that flight!

When she passed by later, I complimented her on her creation and asked if I might get another glass. Not only did she mix up another batch, she also came back on the PA system and taught us all how to make the drink, complete with the correct ratios of cranapple juice, orange juice, and ginger ale, and even two variations some people preferred.

Naturally, I gave her one of the special recognition coupons American sends to its frequent flyers to they can recognize outstanding employees.

More importantly, the whole experience brought a smile to my face when just a few days earlier it looked like we were going to lose my mother.

Hopefully your customers, clients, patients, and members won't find themselves in the same situation I was in up in New York, but people's lives are extremely busy, and they're continually stressed, fatigued, and overextended.

Anything you can do to brighten up their days and bring a smile to their face is a good thing. It may not directly lead to trackable sales and increased revenue, but it's nice to do and it will make you both feel good.

Ron Rosenberg, Business Self-Defense, Tricks & Tales, Week of June 8, 2009

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CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH A WRENCH

Question: How do you know for certain that you have provided your customer the very best in customer service?

Answer: When they are thanking you as they hand you the check.

Not long ago the heating element gave up the ghost in our dryer at home. It's been a great dryer but it is old and probably is in need of replacing. Being as cheap as I am (I like to think of myself as uber-thrifty), I'm going to try to squeeze another thirty or forty years out of it.

I called the appliance repair center and was told by a bored-sounding customer service rep that a house call by their technician would run me just under \$100 for his "diagnostic visit."

Now, not liking to trounce a company by name, I want you to know that I'm going to avoid naming the appliance repair company and will just refer to it as Sneers.

Since my Sneers dryer was old and I didn't want to pay a repairman--um, excuse me, I mean "diagnostician"-- \$100 bucks to come to my house to tell me I need to buy a new dryer, I asked the customer rep if she could tell me if they still make the heating element for my dryer. At this, she sounded irritated that A] I'm using up valuable oxygen on the planet B] she was still on the phone with me, and C] I was making her look up stuff on her computer. But I persisted and finally she sighed and I heard the angry tapping of a keyboard in the background. Then she told me that yes, they still make the desired part but that it was on back order and would take three or four weeks to get in... maybe. I couldn't help but notice how happy she sounded delivering this news.

I got off the phone with her and found another repairman in my area that would only charge \$10 bucks to come out and take a look at my dryer. After talking with the good folks at Sneers, \$10 sounded like a pretty good deal, so I had the guy come take a look at my dryer. When he got to my house it took him about three minutes to take my dryer apart and confirm the heating element was shot.

"Can you get the replacement part?" I asked, fearing the worse.

"Sure, I have one in my van right now," he answered.

Hmmm. This rare, antique dryer part that Sneers had on back order happened to be out in his van.

He brought the part in and I compared it to the old part and sure enough, it was the exact same part. He installed it inside of about five minutes and the dryer worked perfectly.

Well, now he had my attention so I asked him if he also worked on washing machines. Mine had stopped agitating properly about a month earlier. He told me he did and would be happy to look at it for no extra charge since he was already at my house. He did so and told me it was a simple repair. He also said that he had the parts in his van and would knock a bit off the price if I went ahead and got it done that day.

Wanting to make sure I wasn't being taken for a ride, I hovered over him and peppered him with questions about the repair, which he seemed more than happy to answer.

When he finished with the washer my wife asked him, "Do you work on ice makers?" Ours had burned out the week before. (When it rains, it pours, huh?).

He said he did and—you guessed it—he would be happy to take a look at ours for no extra charge. He diagnosed the problem quickly, had the part in his van and—you guessed it again—gave me a discount since I was willing to go ahead and have him take care of it while he was already there. Since his trip to my house, I've probably recommended his business a half dozen times.

What did he do to make me such a big fan of his?

- 1] He was willing to prove himself and his services for a chance to earn my business.
- 2] He responded to my needs in a timely manner.
- 3] He listened to my questions and answered me with respect and patience.
- 4] He offered me a valuable service for what I felt was a fair price.
- 5] He evinced ownership in the quality of his work and backed it up with his personal guarantee.

All of these things are evidence of quality customer service and in a tough economy, it's a good idea to remember that good customer service = happy customers = job security.

And, by the way, when the repairman left my house that day, I was thanking him as I handed him a check for two or three times what I had originally intended to spend and haven't regretted it for a moment since.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE BASKET CASE

Customer service means never saying “no.”

I went into a sweets store at the mall this past weekend to buy a gift basket for a visiting client. As I browsed the store’s shelves, I noticed the goodies in the baskets looked less than appetizing, so I asked Jeff, the customer service representative, if he could make a fresh basket for me.

“No,” he said, “I can’t do it for you today.” Then he went back to the counter and waited on another customer.

I thought about it for a bit and then reapproached Jeff. “Why can’t I get a gift basket made today?”

“Because my basket guy has already gone home” he replied. “He won’t be back in until Monday.”

Now, you should know that whenever I am confronted with stupidity, it’s really, really hard for me not to smart off. Sometimes, I’m able to hold back if I try super hard. This wasn’t one of those times.

“Does your basket guy have some sort of special basket-creating license that allows him, and nobody else, to put candy in a basket and wrap it?” I asked.

“Well, no, but he’s the only one that knows how to work the shrink wrap machine.”

You just can’t make this stuff up.

Sensing that a solution might be in sight because I have some experience with shrink wrap machines, and thus have been fully trained in the mysterious art of shrink-wrapping, I thought I might mention this to Jeff and see if he might be open to me stepping in to pinch hit.

“Hey Jeff, I know how to work a shrink wrap machine,” I began. “It’s a pretty straight-forward operation. You just slip the basket in, seal it and then heat it, right?”

“Well, it’s hard because the plastic wrap can get holes in it and stuff,” he replied, and then turned away and walked back to the counter.

I’ll admit that Jeff’s amazing powers of customer non-service almost had me stumped, but I knew in my heart that if I tried hard and exerted all of my creativity and will, I might be able to draw from Jeff the customer service I needed. So, I thought I would spell it out for Jeff and see if I could get him to rise to the challenge.

“Jeff,” I began, looking him square in the eye, “I am trying to give your store some MONEY. What I’d like for you to do is offer me some options that will allow me to do that. What are my options for buying something nice for my client today, not Monday?”

“Well, I can’t make you a *basket*, but I guess I could make a gift *box* for you.”

Hallelujah and pass the peas. A customer service convert. One down, about a billion to go.

The principle that I was subtly trying to get Jeff to understand was that you never, ever tell a customer “no.” Instead, replace that word with the words “no, but...”

In Jeff’s situation, the conversation might have sounded less like, “No, you’re out of luck” and more like, “Hmm, I can’t get you a fresh basket right now, but how about some of our fresh pralines and fudge in one of our gift boxes?”

How hard would that have been?

There are several reasons to use this approach instead of saying “no.”

1] When you tell a customer “no,” you risk sending them down the street to your competition. There are just too many people waiting in line for a customer’s business for you to shut them down cold.

2] The word “no” is offensive. There are too many great alternatives to use instead.

3] When you offer options, you show the customer that you actually care.

Which brings me to my final point. Before saying no—and I know this is really going to stretch a lot of folks out there—why not just try! Give it a shot. Go for it. Give it a whirl.

If you fail to make the figurative gift basket, you can always default to the “no, but...” method afterward.

In a recession-stricken economy, there are only two types of businesses: Those that offer excellent customer service and those that are either going out, or have gone out, of business. Which one do you want yours to be?.

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INSTITUTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE IN CLE

Nathaniel T. Trelease

What is Institutional Customer Service?

Institutional customer service is the process of maintaining, servicing and growing an organizational relationship, taking it beyond a mere vendor-customer arrangement and making it into a partnership. My organization works with state and county level bar associations nationwide providing certain distance learning programming and technology services. When my team works with bar association staff to market, deliver and administer distance learning programs we are providing a form of institutional customer service – service to an organization, its decision makers and staff, not to an end customer (a bar member).

This brief article and my remarks focus on this component of customer service – not so much conventional customer service on the front lines to retail customers as much as how you provide secondary customer service to organizational partners who in turn service the end customer.

What's the Goal of Institutional Customer Service?

The goal of institutional customer service is to become largely invisible to the final customer and a source of predictability to the organizational client. Managing a CLE organization can be a challenge, with multiple competing (and sometimes warring) constituencies. The goal of institutional customer service is not to add to these challenges but to be a palliative – on the scene when something unexpected goes wrong, but otherwise to quietly and reliably provide certain support services. In CLE, predictability is a cardinal virtue.

You are doing your job best when no one has to think to call you in the week because you have given them what they needed before they had to ask – you were reliable in providing the services to which you committed.

What Are Some Tips in Providing Good Institutional Customer Service?

- **Open and honest communication on a regular basis.** One of the early indicators of success in an organizational relationship is whether you can establish open and honest communications among decision makers. Communications do not need to be frequent unless circumstances require it, but they do need to be regular – establishing a pattern and a relationship. We have never had a successful relationship in the absence of regular, open and honest conversations. If an organizational partner will not make time to talk to you or the conversation is uncomfortable, the relationship will not work.

Candor in these conversations is essential. Without it, you cannot fully understand the needs of your partners, the internal demands on decision makers and the expectations of their organizations. We may not always agree or be able to satisfy certain demands, but without open and honest conversations in a professional and fraternal environment

it is impossible for you to grow a mutually beneficially relationship. Too much is left to guesswork which breeds misunderstanding and a series of minor problems that become sand in the machine.

- **Understand the needs of the internal constituencies of your clients.** Your job in institutional customer service is to know the identities and understand the needs of the constituencies to whom your partner must be responsive. You need to understand what deliverables each person needs and when – marketing information by certain publishing dates, program materials according to certain operating tempos, verified attendance reports for submission to MCLE commissions at definite stages on timelines, etc. You need to map these expectations and build them into your own operations.

Your job in institutional customer service is to help your partners provide value to their members/customers, facilitate efficiency within their organizations (or at least not gum up the works), and satisfy or maybe exceed the expectations of their executive leadership. All of these will change over time. Thus when you study an organizational client and its needs through the regular and candid conversations described above, you must be mindful that this is a work in progress. You must be vigilant to how changing needs, personnel and policies will also change *what* you do or *how* you do it.

- **Be first to sound the alert and be a first responder.** Problems in CLE tend to grow geometrically. Issues raised by accrediting agencies, problems opening electronic material, widespread or narrow gauge technical issues – these and many others are not issues that resolve themselves and go away. They require attention and volition.

If the occurrence of these issues will immediately or over time cause institutional distractions or problems for a partner, bite the bullet and be the first to sound the alarm and to respond. Be candid with your organizational partners – you are not perfect now and never will be, but you will make best efforts to correct errors as they arise and fix problems.

As noted above, one of your goals in institutional customer service is not to gum up the works of an organization's processes. In our case, we mostly succeed, but, candidly, sometimes we fail. It is a great comfort among your organizational partners to know that you are not indifferent to their problems – problems that you may have created in the first instance – and that you are committed to making it right.

The feedback we appreciate most from our partners comes in times of distress – when they tell us that they know we will take care of issues because they know we care about their members as much as they do. You cannot have a successful relationship in the absence of this type of trust.

- **Periodic assessments of what's working/not working.** Don't reinvent a wheel that continues to roll in a reasonably good fashion. Change for the sake of change uproots existing methodologies without producing value for those involved. With too many

moving parts in an organization and in a process (CLE is not a simple matter), random reinventions produces only frustration (or worse), not value.

Still, we live in a time in which technologies are changing, competition is growing and the CLE economy is entering its fourth year of strong headwinds and uncertainty. Taking time to sit down with your organizational partners, face to face or in a series of planned calls, and talk about what has slowed or stopped working and how things can be reworked to produce more value is essential in a time of change.

In our case, we have often talked to partners and learned that simple changes in our process or theirs can substantially reduce inefficiencies or tensions, or grow what we are doing together. Understanding *how* your partners do what they do is as important as *what* they do. Making the *how* easier, where possible, helps grow the *what*.