



# Ten Tips to Maintaining Your Customer Service Edge

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I'm dumfounded when I encounter wait staff, customer support personnel, or sales people that provide poor service. "Customer service" is often in their job title, yet it seems they're thinking, "If it wasn't for customers, this would be a great job." Maybe they should try a different line of work, like cleaning toilets. Why would anyone be rude to the very source of their livelihood?

We've all had experience with rude people in our travels. Everyone can relate to a bad customer service experience in a restaurant or automobile repair shop. But what about in your business? How do your customers rate their experience with you?

Take an inventory of your customer facing skills. Consider how you're doing. Follow these ten tips to ensure you are providing great customer service:

- 1. Know Where Your Paycheck Comes From** - Your customers are your livelihood regardless of the position you hold. Product development, customer support, shipping, HR, legal, training, and every other department in your organization depends on a sale and a customer for their existence. **Self assessment:** Are customers a nuisance to you or do you get excited by the opportunity to have a customer encounter?
- 2. Possess a Positive Attitude** – Attitudes are infectious, good or bad. Make yours a good one if you want your customer to have a good one too. Be enthusiastic. Be friendly. Smile. Your attitude has a huge impact. **Self assessment:** Is your attitude dependent on your customer's attitude or is it positive regardless of the circumstances?
- 3. Strive for Expertise** – You might be customer oriented, but if you don't know your products and services, you will disappoint. Make maintaining competence a primary goal. Learn as much as you can about your offerings and how they are used by your customers. Find opportunities to get in-depth practical experience. Continuously learn and maintain the expertise required to be a recognized expert in your field. **Self assessment:** What are you doing to maintain world-class expertise in your field?
- 4. Make a Great First Impression** – A first impression lasts a long time. Be respectful and confident. Replace any arrogance with humility. Introduce yourself and make your customer feel that you will give them your best. Call them by their name (not "buddy") to show you care about them. When face to face, look them in their eyes. **Self assessment:** Do you make a big deal out of making a proper first introduction, looking people in their eyes, and remembering their names?
- 5. Build Rapport** - Exchange the appropriate amount of small talk for the situation before getting down to business. Don't ask how their day is going if they are in the middle of an emergency, but if in a more relaxed circumstance a short conversation before attending to their needs will make their experience more personal and enjoyable. **Self assessment:** Do you engage in the proper amount of rapport building before digging into business?
- 6. Focus on Their Needs** – The customer's needs come before yours. Seek to understand their application, budget, desired outcome, and expectations. Take notes. Show you care. With rare exception, erase the words "that is not my job" from your vocabulary. Focus on meeting their needs and your needs will be met like the repayment of a loan, but with interest. **Self assessment:** Do you focus on the customer and their needs before your own?



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7. **Find a Way to Say “Yes”** – There will always be requests to which you can’t give an unconditional “yes”, but instead of defaulting to “no, because ...”, find ways to say “yes, if ...” For example, when someone wants you to discount your service by another 10%, instead of saying “no I can’t because our promotion is now over”, say, “yes I might get that approval if you will write us a publishable customer testimonial”. **Self assessment:** Do you see opportunity in every customer request, and do you look for appropriate conditions that can make them a win-win for you both?
8. **Go Over the Top** - Find a way to “go over the top”. Exceed expectations. Don’t merely meet expectations, and certainly don’t make up excuses for missing expectations. If for some reason you can’t meet expectations, find something of value you can offer to make up the difference. If things aren’t going well, maintain a calm disposition and never threaten your customer. **Self assessment:** Do you make every effort to ensure your customer’s experience with you is a great one which they will never forget?
9. **Follow-up Like You Care** – Be responsive and thorough. Be prompt. Provide a brief status report even if you’ve not made much progress on their request. It will let them know you are still working on it and looking out for their best interest. Error on the side of over communications. **Self assessment:** Do you follow-up quickly and thoroughly on your commitments?
10. **Show Your Gratitude** – When the service is over, the sale is completed, and there is no more material gain for you, that is when your gratitude is known to be sincere. Ensure your customer is satisfied. Say thanks and show your gratitude. **Self assessment:** When the sale is completed and the work is over, do you show your attitude of gratitude?

Follow these ten principles to ensure all your customer interactions are the best they can be.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.activatingyourambition.com](http://www.activatingyourambition.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corporation ([www.alpinelink.com](http://www.alpinelink.com)), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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