

A summary of best practices in managing customer service found during my research

Summarised by Andrew Gibbons

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1. Involving customers in training and development events to ensure first hand reality.
2. Measuring customer satisfaction, and specifically measuring the rights things - those customers see as being the crucial incidents or processes that determine the perception of customer service.
3. Writing and working to meaningful mission statements that make direct reference to the needs of the customer.
4. Finding ways to associate remuneration and rewards to attributable and accurate measures of customer satisfaction and retention.
5. Measuring customer defection rate, and finding out why they leave. In very few cases, involving senior management in this.
6. Differentiation in very specific terms of customer segments, and varying customer service strategies accordingly.
7. Making real efforts to retain key competent customer contact employees.
8. Involving customers in the selection of customer facing people, particularly those with whom future staff will have most contact.
9. Investing significantly in the recruitment and selection, and subsequent training and development of key customer facing people.
10. Benchmarking against, and developing positive relationships with, others from whom customer service learning can flow.
11. Assigning personal responsibilities for customer satisfaction, and ensure accountability for this.
12. Using customer orientation as a selection criteria for redundancy.
13. Siting staff, head office, and anyone else that would benefit, close enough to operational/functional areas of work to minimise potential problems of remoteness from customer issues.
14. Formulating, disseminating, and making use of a customer service policy.
15. Building customer service issues into appraisals.
16. Genuinely empowering staff to make decisions, and please customers, and not being inflexible.
17. Listening to the views and experiences of those who have most contact with customers.
18. Using any appropriate measures and Standards (e.g. NVQs and Charter marks) to improve matters.
19. Confronting unhelpful or obstructive behaviour, that get in the way of the customer strategy, whoever is the source.
20. Constantly researching customer service issues to make sure you are up to date, and within this research, increasing knowledge of your customers and *their* customers and competitors.
21. Spending more time than the competition with customers, and not confining these visits to senior management or functional specialists.
22. Drawing up and implementing customer retention plans.

23. Keeping up to date with, and staying ahead of, the competitions' efforts to improve their customer service.
24. Putting a lot of thought into the way complaints are managed. Developing recovery procedures and practices that encourage complaints. Analysing and learning from complaints.
25. Holding customer councils - and paying expenses!
26. Placing emphasis upon the retention of existing profitable customers.
27. Most senior management showing their own personal commitment to customer service in high-profile, symbolic but real ways...e.g. spending time on reception as first points of contact with customers, or manning the stall at trade fairs.
28. Identifying those customers that for whatever reason should *not* be kept, then disengaging.
29. Employing third parties to survey and/or interview lapsed customers to determine the reasons for defections and then taking action to lessen this.
30. Feeling comfortable with there being a net cost over return for many customer transactions if future worthwhile business is to be retained and encouraged.
31. Doing whatever possible to create and develop an organisational culture that is blame-free, within which difficulties affecting customers are confronted positively, and in which people take individual personal responsibility for, for instance, putting things right that go wrong.
32. Customer feedback is widely shared amongst all who find it valuable.
33. As many people as possible get some front-line customer contact.
34. Employee of the month, year or whatever.
35. Open book policies with customers...no secrets.
36. Reply paid surveys, follow ups or questionnaires.
37. Involving most senior level management in symbolic, high profile, customer contact events.
38. Freephone numbers to ease access.
39. Most senior management making direct phone contact with randomly selected customers to see how they are feeling, and proactively seek feedback. For example the seven Directors of the Washington Bullets basketball team make five such calls a week to season ticket holders.
40. Management for instance, but it could also say, be a design team or whatever, personally experiencing the organisation's products or services.
41. Ringing complaining customers to clarify reasons for complaints.
42. Following up customers who complain to let them know the actions that resulted from their complaint.
43. Making appropriate, positive, and balanced use of 'mystery shoppers'.
44. Using customer focus groups to monitor service delivery and for instance breakdown points.
45. Deliberately targeting those existing customers who do *not* respond to surveys with a second round of contact. These may well be the disaffected people whose views and opinions most need to be heard.
46. Seconding staff to, with and from, customer's organisations to help bonding and better understand key processes and practices.
47. I like to see supermarkets providing customers with wipe boards on which to suggest items they want stocked, or to make comments.

48. Ensuring unhindered access from customers to senior management - for instance via telephone.
49. Maintaining the goodwill of long term customers by for instance being flexible in releasing them from long term contracts, thus turning them into 'Apostles' and not 'Terrorists'.
50. Finding out what annoys customers, and where possible, taking action to minimise and prevent this.
51. Being prepared to suffer the agony of reviewing and learning from your own customer service failures and breakdowns, and not being duped into a preoccupation with assumed customer loyalty, or of seeking to import other organisations' or sectors' successes.
52. Giving very senior managers a genuine slice of life in customer-facing roles so they see what is really going on at that level in the organisation.
53. The Chief Executive recording a weekly, and very informal, chatty freephone telephone message, which can be accessed by all staff wherever they are, which in a subtle yet very direct way reinforces customer-orientation, in an opt-in way rather than for instance via in-your-face style circulars.
54. Making concessions to customers with good grace.
55. Employing people who have recently worked for customer or client organisations, and in a way that does feel like 'poaching' to those same organisations.
56. Proactively identifying 'most valued' customers, and offering discounts and benefits that eat at least marginally into existing profit from them in order to make their retention more likely. For instance, some of the merged building societies are paying higher 'bounty' payments to their loyal customers than to those that are newly acquired.
57. Some organisations, that really are serious about closing the loop of customer complaints at the very least ring them up to see how they feel about the way their complaint was managed, and whether or not they are satisfied. Those most concerned about their customers make a point of offering them a visit in their home to demonstrate real commitment. How many organisations feel they just can't do this?

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