

Good customer service is the lifeblood of any business. You can offer promotions and slash prices to bring in as many new customers as you want, but unless you can get some of those customers to come back, your business won't be profitable for long.

Good customer service is all about bringing customers back. And about sending them away happy - happy enough to pass positive feedback about your business along to others, who may then try the product or service you offer for themselves and in their turn become repeat customers.

If you're a good salesperson, you can sell anything to anyone once. But it will be your approach to customer service that determines whether or not you'll ever be able to sell that person anything else. The essence of good customer service is forming a relationship with customers a relationship that an individual customer feels he would like to pursue.

I know this verges on the kind of statement that's often seen on a wall plaque, but providing good customer service **"IS"** a simple thing.

1. Answer your phone.

Make sure that someone with a pleasant voice is picking up the phone when someone calls your business.

2. Don't make promises unless you "WILL" keep them.

Reliability is one of the keys to any good relationship, and good customer service is no exception.

3. Listen to your customers.

Let your customer talk and show him that you are listening by making the appropriate responses, such as suggesting certain merchandise or how to solve the problem.

4. Deal with complaints.

Give the complaint your attention, you may be able to please this one person this one time -- and position your business to reap the benefits of good customer service.

5. Be helpful - even if there's no immediate profit in it.

The other day Jane popped into a local watch shop because she had lost the small piece that clips the pieces of her watch band together. When she explained the problem, the proprietor said that he thought he might have one lying around. He found it, attached it to her watch band - and charged her nothing! Where do you think Jane will go when she needs a new watch band or even a new watch? And how many people do you think she has told this story to?

6) Train your staff to be ALWAYS helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable.

Give every member of your staff enough information and power to make those small customer-pleasing decisions, so he never has to say, "I don't know."

7) Take the extra step.

Lead the customer to the item they asked about. Better yet, wait and see if he has questions about it, or further needs. Whatever the extra step may be, if you want to provide good customer service, take it.

8) Throw in something extra.

Whether it's a coupon for a future discount, additional information on how to use the product, or a genuine smile -- people love to get more than they expect.

If you apply these eight simple rules consistently, your business will become known for its good customer service. And the best part? The irony of good customer service is that over time it will bring in more new customers than promotions and price slashing ever did!

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