

According to Barbara Wold, International Speaker, Author and Business Strategist, companies might want to step up their efforts when it comes to providing quality customer service.

### Checklist: Customer Care Program

- 1. Secure top management commitment** - Unless top management is fully committed to the concept of customer care, there is very little chance of success. A formalized customer care program with involved leadership helps to focus roles and responsibilities in a clear manner.
- 2. Know your customers** - Excellence in customer care is reliant upon knowing your customers' needs and expectations. Needs are not the same as demands: people don't ask for what they don't expect to get, even when it could be provided. Anticipating real needs can give a competitive advantage.
- 3. Assimilate the major elements of customer care** - Customer care is more than just an excellent product or first-class service; it involves a host of elements that contribute to genuine care and value for the customer.
- 4. Develop service levels** - It may be the case that performance standards do exist but are not formalized, recorded or audited. It is good to set levels which are challenging but have a realistic chance of attainment.
- 5. Recruit the right staff** - Your service is only as professional as the people delivering it; attracting new customers and retaining existing ones are tasks for competent people. Focusing the recruitment process on customer care can mean introducing questions at the interview stage.
- 6. Get your communications right** - Top management commitment to a customer care program is no good if the right message is not conveyed to all staff in the right way. Communications have to be reliable, consistent and regular so that all people receive the same message and interpret it in the same way so that the end results are the same.
- 7. Convert complainants back into customers** - Prompt and sympathetic handling of complaints can turn a disgruntled customer into a happy--and longer-lasting--one. People whose complaints are fully dealt with are more loyal than those who have no complaints.
- 8. Reward service accomplishments** - Recognition and reward for superior performance helps with reinforcement. Try to recognize smaller accomplishments not just the major ones.
- 9. Stay close to your customers** - Staying close to customers means:
  - Carrying out continuous research in order to learn from them
  - Asking questions about the quality and performance of the product at regular intervals after the sale
  - Developing procedures to stay up-to-date with customer needs
  - Listening – really listening!
- 10. Train your people and work towards continuous improvement** - Training staff to understand customer needs and tackle customer problems, to turn threats into opportunities, is also a prerequisite for effective and lasting customer care. Training on a continuing basis, especially in friendly telephone and face-to-face techniques, which result in sincerity and substance rather than empty phraseology, can provide organizations with an advantage that will score with customers.