

## Citizen Services

# Perfecting Customer Service: Quality Is In The Eye Of The Beholder

By **Wendi Pomerance Brick**



**B**eing "good" at providing a high quality service to our customers – everyone we encounter everyday – is a given. We all understand the importance of making great impressions although our reasons could be different in different situations.

We may be trying to serve more people in the same amount of time, prevent people from getting upset and frustrated, calm someone who is upset and frustrated, seek repeat business, or foster our general belief that the noblest motive is in fact the public good.

However, when you say "be good at customer service", you are leaving that statement open to interpretation.

People are like snowflakes – each one is different. Each employee comes from a unique upbringing, ethnicity, value set, state, country, not to mention the four-five generations currently working together. They will have different interpretations of general statements like "good customer service."

Recognize these disparities exist and you'll have a better chance to set your team up for success.

It is crucial to provide written best practices and expectations for great service. And it's also important to provide them for all of the varied situations in which an employee may make an impression of quality on a customer, whether directly or indirectly.

Some examples of direct impressions could be when you assist someone in person, over the phone or send them an email response.

Indirect impressions are made when a customer comes to your building and is looking for helpful signage, when they see someone driving a vehicle with your agency's logo on the door, or when they visit a park and take a look at the condition of the restrooms.

Let me give you a few examples of how setting standards will define the behaviors people should exhibit when they are asked to be "good" at customer service.

### **In Person**

- Dress in appropriate work attire - general appearance should modest, neat and clean
- Wear name badge
- Keep work area neat, organized and clean
- Make eye contact and smile when appropriate
- Greet all customers and ask "How may I assist you today?"

### **On the Telephone**

- Use the proper standard greeting
- Listen actively – focus attention on the caller
- Summarize and paraphrase any actions to be taken at the end of the call
- Give choices/options when you can
- Ask permission before placing a caller on hold, and thank them for holding

### **Via Email**

- Use proper grammar
- Use complete sentences instead of short commands
- Spell check and proof read your correspondence
- Never send an email you would be embarrassed to have your mother read, or to see posted on the front page of your local newspaper
- Avoid emoticons

It may also be a good idea to share with people what not to say or do. Here are some of my favorites:

- Don't speak badly about other team members or other government agencies, especially in earshot of a customer. "Blame the State for the budget cuts, not me."
- Don't blame others; instead, focus on correcting the problem. "Oh, that Sally, she's always making that mistake."
- Don't talk about personal issues in front of customers. "I have this itchy rash that won't go away – would you like a pen?"
- Do not share personal opinions on work or current events with customers. "Can you believe the story about that kidnapper? He should fry." "I'm so upset with my supervisor, I can't see straight!"
- Do not allow customers to overhear back office chatter or comments, especially if the comments are related to their transaction. "I'm not going to hurry through this just because they're in a rush. They should have planned ahead."

This is only just scratching the surface, and it's important to dig deep while setting standards to ensure everyone is on the same page. I would also encourage you to involve your team in setting these

expectations – people who do the job everyday are generally very aware of how it could be optimally performed. Most people would love to share their opinion with you – if you would only ask.

Once expectations have been set, you're ready to move on to the next step – giving your team the training and skills they need to implement the expectations, which coincidentally will be the topic of my next post. Go do great things!

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