

AT YOUR SERVICE!

by Carolann Philips

A recent survey conducted indicates that customers leave their service provider for four basic reasons: 14% leave because they are dissatisfied with the product, 9% leave because they are unhappy with the price, 5 % leave for various personal reasons and 72% leave because of poor customer service. In the corporate world, customer service and etiquette are two sides of the same coin. Etiquette is one of the most overlooked facets of customer service. It is hard, if not impossible to deliver good customer service without practicing business etiquette. An employee's manners and behavior determines the level of customer service he or she will provide. Courtesy, respect and consideration are not mere niceties in business but the corner stones of superior customer service and profits. Business etiquette and manners provides a high degree of satisfaction to customers. They lend a touch of class and change normal, routine customer interactions into exceptional and memorable experiences. In the best of times, etiquette gives an organization the edge over competition. In difficult times, it is what sets an organization apart.

The basics of good customer service etiquette start with appearance and grooming and include greeting and welcoming customers with good eye contact and a smile. If you are at a desk in your office and you see a client approaching, leave your seat and take a few steps towards the customer. Handshakes should always be made standing. Never shake hands across a desk. Service counters however are an exception. When introducing yourself, say your name and briefly state your job role. Show the customer a seat and offer to help. Sit with a straight back, leaning forward slightly. Place your hands above

the table. When speaking, your body should face the customer, not the computer screen. Do not interrupt the customer. Listen to understand his or her needs and concerns. Summarize the query or situation before offering a response or solution. This shows the customer that you are listening. If you need to use your computer or leave your desk in order to help, tell the customer what you are about to do and the expected outcome. Don't leave a confused customer staring blankly as you immerse yourself with the computer or walk away. Always thank the customer for filling out a form, submitting documents or paying a bill. This is a simple yet powerful gesture that many customer service representatives fail to do. Never misspell a customer's name. If in doubt always ask. This shows the customer that you have a genuine interest in him or her. If you cannot provide an answer or service, show a genuine desire to help by taking the time to guide the customer in the right direction or find someone else who could help. Customers always notice and remember when an effort is made on their behalf. Do not treat customers differently based on who they are. A customer is a customer regardless of rank or status. There are many other ways to recognize or reward customers, but visibly differentiated customer service is not one of them.

The customer service paradigm includes many more etiquette elements and guidelines. Today's customers can choose who they do business with. And they prefer to do business with people that treat them with dignity and respect. With competition being what it is, the knowledge and proper display of customer service etiquette is the most powerful tool to gain a competitive edge. Businesses that make an effort to train their people in etiquette and protocol earn a discernable edge. Besides, a culture of courtesy and respect

makes for a more pleasant workplace thereby having a definite impact on productivity and profitability.

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Carolann has had the pleasure of delivering programs to a diverse clientele; from major airlines, leading banks, embassies, and reputed business houses to the modeling & fashion industry and royalty within the GCC. She is also a columnist for the 'Thursday' magazine, a local publication.