

Creating a Customer-Focused Company

“You’re in good hands.” “Leave the driving to us.” “It’s your store.” “Helping make your life easier.” “We’re in your corner.” We’ve heard all the slogans: companies promise to treat their customers like royalty. Everyone claims to have superior customer service. But does everyone deliver? A RightNow Technologies survey named poor customer service as the #1 reason people stop doing business with a company. It’s clear that for many companies, customer service never transforms from a slogan into a way of doing business.

Customer service is an endangered species in today’s business environment. This fact is not just a constant annoyance to consumers; it also presents a great opportunity for any business that wants to separate itself from its competitors. But you’ll need more than a catchy slogan to make your company customer focused. It takes total commitment from everyone in the company to make customers totally satisfied. Another study shows that a “totally satisfied” customer is six times more likely to become a repeat customer than someone who describes herself as “satisfied.” That means total satisfaction should be every company’s goal.

How do you create a company that’s really committed to customer service? Here are 5 steps every company can take:

- 1) Make a claim and back it up. A catchy slogan won’t change the culture of your business. But it will put everyone on notice that you are serious about satisfying customers. Come up with an easy-to-remember phrase that summarizes your commitment to customers. (If you want to make sure employees share your commitment to customers, have them help craft your slogan.) Then promote that phrase as your promise to put customers first. Ask customers to hold you accountable for living up to your words.
- 2) Hire good people. Make sure that everyone who works directly with your customers is professional, courteous, knowledgeable and eager to help. Give them hypothetical situations dealing with unhappy customers. Let them tell you how they would handle these situations. Don’t forget to use your best people to recruit other people to work for you. Your people may know someone who would be a great fit for your company.
- 3) Empower and reward your people. It isn’t enough to hire good people. You’ve got to let them handle hard cases as soon as they happen. They need to be able to give refunds, free products, free service, whatever is necessary to make the customer happy. Support your employees, even if you think they handled it wrong. Use planned, consistent training sessions to raise your people’s level of performance. Reward your people for taking care of customers. Use time off, plaques, free dinners, cash bonuses, or other premiums. Just make sure you reward people publicly, on a regular basis.
- 4) Deal immediately with dissatisfied customers. Most customers won’t say anything right away if they’re unhappy. That’s why everyone in your company who deals with

customers needs to be taught to see the signs that a customer isn't pleased. Those signs may include: they seem less talkative or more uneasy around you than usual, they no longer give you compliments on your business, they start talking about how good things used to be, or they give compliments to other suppliers. Any of these things could be signs that your customer is drifting away from you.

5) Keep communication lines open between you and your customers. Make sure that all of your company communications (product brochures, technical manuals, sales literature, etc.) focus on your customers' needs, and how your company's strengths can satisfy those needs. Also, give your customers regular occasions to let you know how they think you're doing. Use periodic customer satisfaction surveys and consistent contact with your best customers to see what you're doing right, and how you can improve.

It doesn't require new equipment or a costly overhaul of your business to implement these ideas. It does take some hard work, teamwork, and a consistent commitment to see your customers totally satisfied. Businesses who dedicate themselves to building a customer-focused business will find that the hard work pays off in two of the most important ways possible: loyal customers and steady, increased profits.