



## [DR. SHIRLEY SAYS...]

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# Dazzle your customers with 'wow' services

Research continues to indicate that exceptional customer service is a key to providing a competitive advantage and ranks high on the statistical chart as a strategy for success in today's global business environment. As markets become more sophisticated and customers more demanding with greater expectations, competition can be brutal.

In today's economy, the customer is king, and most have adopted the attitude, "If I or my company choose to spend money with you, you have to earn it." The result is that in virtually every industry, a multitude of businesses offering similar products and services are now zealously competing on price, quality, quantity and just about anything else they can offer.

So what differentiates one organization from another? How does a company attract customers? More importantly, how does it hold on to them? Ultimately, there is one major area in which a business can distinguish itself, offer added value and gain a competitive edge, and that is exceptional service that creates a "wow" experience for its customers. A wow experience, as one of my clients so passionately defines it, is "exceptional service without exception." What a concept!

Customer service pays. It does not cost. But it does mean that everyone in the organization has to become involved. Whatever the size or nature of your business, whatever your role in the company, you are involved in customer service. How you interact with customers will have an effect on everything your company is trying to achieve. We are all ambassadors for our respective organizations.

So how can you provide wow cus-

tomers that dazzles? Here is a seven-step plan you can follow:

➤ Know your customer. Understand what it is about your organization that makes customers come to you instead of your competition. Identify your strengths and build upon them.

➤ Know your competition. Know what your competition is doing at all times. Are they doing something new or different? Are they doing something better than you? How can you do something better than them? Always ask yourself these questions. Keep your business on top when it comes to quality of products and service.

➤ Retain your customers. It can cost five-10 times more to acquire a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. Keep your customers delighted. Treat them like gold. Remember, every customer you lose is a customer gained by your competition.

➤ Create a positive first impression. The first contact your customers have with your organization is critical. Take measures to make sure that first contact is a magic moment instead of a tragic moment. In these days of shrinking profit margins, little things can make a big difference. Mother Teresa put it very well when she said, "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."

➤ Approach complaints with a positive attitude. When you're dealing with customers on an ongoing basis, you'll undoubtedly receive your fair share of complaints. So keep in mind the motto: "Don't take it personally, take it professionally." After that, it's

simply a question of approaching the problem with the right attitude to ensure customer satisfaction.

➤ Sharpen your customer service skills. Customer service training is the most valuable tool you can give yourself or, as a manager, your employees. The skills mastered will enable everyone to become more productive, enjoy

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their job more, increase their value to the company and improve customer service at all levels.

➤ Measure customer satisfaction. Continuously monitor your business. Never sit back and relax. Offer new products or services as needs require. Ask the customer what you can do better. That information is the vital link between your business and your customers, and can help provide the kind of service and satisfaction that builds customers for life.

In any business today, the wow customer service commitment must be renewed every day. We have to tend to it, we have to feed it, we have to care about it, and we have to live it. When we do, that commitment translates into delighted customers, repeat business, referrals and increased profits.

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