

### **IN THIS ISSUE**

- Guidelines for Superior Customer Service
- How *Not* to Email
- The Value of Spirituality
- Free Yourself to Discover Solutions

### **How *Not* to Email**

The ease and availability of emailing colleagues has led to an explosion in this mode of communicating. Certainly emailing has its advantages, but its very ease of use can result in poor communication. We often whip out an email without taking the time to compose this mini-essay. An even moderately complicated message requires that we first write the piece outside of email and then edit it carefully as with all clear writing. Unless well composed, it is very easy for email to be misinterpreted by the receiver.

Special care should be taken when expressing a concern or addressing an emotionally charged issue. If you are upset or angry, don't jump to email. Realize that you must be even more careful about what you say and how you say it. Keep in mind that by sending an email you are creating a written record. Wait a bit before you write, or write a first draft and sit on it for a while. Even better, consider having a direct conversation rather than sending an email. During direct conversation, you have the full array of communication tools at your disposal, including facial expression and tone of voice. These tools add nuance, emphasis, and clarity that email communication all too often lacks.

### ***Guidelines for Superior Customer Service***

If you are serious about creating a superior customer service experience that distinguishes your brand—whether your product or service is delivered by phone, through the Internet, or in person – follow the key customer service guidelines that have brought success to leading companies, according to Warner B. Wims, Ph.D. President of WBW & Associates.

Recognize that the goal is to help everyone to be a service leader. Create leaders up, down, and across the organization that make customer service a continuous unrelenting mantra, while fostering a healthy work environment. Listen to and act upon employee suggestions to eliminate barriers to superior customer service. Ensure that customer service appears frequently on meeting agendas. Organizations that excel at customer service consistently implement these ideas, and more. Here are a few key guidelines:

#### **Hire correctly in the first place**

It is much easier to hire genuinely courteous, intuitively attentive people who remain calm, caring and maintain attention to detail under stress, than to try to train someone to be that way. Test current employees, using realistic simulations, and train those who have potential for outstanding service skills.

#### **Treat employees the way you want them to treat customers**

“Model and they will follow.” Involve employees in coming up with ideas for service improvement.

#### **Set specific customer service performance standards**

Help employees to see how “little things” matter and how their execution of customer service ties into the big picture. Make sure there are service goals and standards that are meaningful to each level of the organization and each job.

#### **Emphasize how providing excellent service benefits employees**

Providing a good customer experience is not only good for the customers, but makes the employee's experience a better one as well.

#### **Emphasize payback to the business**

Be sure employees understand how the experience of excellent customer service makes all of your products and services appear more attractive and superior.

#### **Urge employees to put the customer's interests first**

Put the customer's interests and wellbeing first, and the impact on the company second. In other words, sacrificing short-term losses for long-term gain is appropriate if service excellence is also achieved.

#### **Measure and reward service excellence**

Track and reward service excellence with the same discipline and emphasis that you

*Continued on next page*

## The Value of Spirituality

As secular as our world may seem at times, especially in our work life, many find value in acknowledging a spiritual side of life.

A working definition of “spirituality” is the acknowledgment of the enormity, awe, beauty, and mystery of existence. An interconnectedness with all living things. The sense of a possible connection with a higher reality or meaning of all life.

Spirituality pertains to an experience, rather than a concept or philosophy. This experience does not require one to be “religious,” although for some the spiritual experience is facilitated through their religion.

Those who acknowledge their spirituality gain the following:

**Peace of Mind.** Accepting that there is much we cannot control frees us to release ourselves from trying to control the uncontrollable.

**Work Satisfaction.** A higher purpose is seen in work. We might feel that it’s not “just a job.” Instead, work can be a noble cause.

**Positive Relationships.** In awe of the universe, feeling an interconnection with all people, one is less likely to be self-centered, greedy, or jealous as we value all of life.

**Heroic.** A spiritual connection can give one the courage to do what is right, even in the face of sacrifice, since we are more conscious of things greater than ourselves. We are not as self-centered and are more in touch with the needs of others.

Ultimately, connecting with one’s spirituality influences the choices we make and how we think about what we do in life, including our work life. For example, some are able to see themselves as healers (of relationships, conflict, the human body, etc.). Some are moved to treat others in a more respectful way (working for compassion, justice, or a better world in general). Regardless of the way in which people live their spiritual choices, those who have a spiritual connection are invariably enlivened by it.

track and reward sales success: service and sales are two sides of the same coin. Create a customer service communication process. Establish an easy, simple process for both employees and customers to discuss concerns and/or move problems or dissatisfactions to a higher level in the organization.

### **Support internal service feedback**

Provide employees with a safe process for giving feedback to each other about customer service performance.

### **Institute a non-threatening process for tracking good and bad customer experiences**

Create an environment of open communication where employees and customers can share concerns and opportunities fearlessly. Survey customer and employee satisfaction, produce actionable data, and seek recommendations. Measure customer experience from the customer’s point of view — not only yours. Repeat what is good and uncover the root cause of the bad.

### **Involve your Board of Directors**

Involve your board of directors in keeping your organization accountable to customers.

### **Match the service experience to the offering**

Different offerings require different kinds of customer service. The more personal or individualized the product or service, for example, the more personal and individualized the experience should be for the customer.

### **Strive to sustain established personal relationships**

Customers are often comforted by established relationships, particularly if they have bonded with certain providers. These relationships are hurt by employee absenteeism and turnover, and may result in customer dissatisfaction.

### **Create a sense of intimacy**

Small is sometimes better. Customer relationships often thrive when you create a sense of intimacy. Even in a large facility, explore how it can be made to feel more intimate and welcoming. Continue to update your facilities, integrating technology to give customers personal access to information and to entertain and engage them on a personal level.

### **Show your best customers that you value their business**

Create the processes needed to reward repeat customer loyalty and provide them with increasingly tailored levels of service excellence.

### **Give customers the option for control**

Some customers will thrive when allowed to manage their own account or services, including online services.

### **Automate for greater ease of use**

Automated systems are often appropriate and desired if they are simple. Create a one-stop shop for services. Don’t send the customer down a long chain of connections.

## **Strive for excellence at all the contact points in the customer experience**

Your customer's first impression may be negative if there is trash in the parking lot (or "junk" on your website), or if there is an uninviting entrance to your facility (or your website home page is uninviting). The customer will also be turned off by prolonged wait (or download) times, difficulty getting to the right person (or information) quickly, and so forth. These are all critical touch points to refine.

## **Make sure that signage, or links, are a snap to follow**

Remember that not all customers find it easy to follow directions. There may be times when repetition and redundancy are helpful. Test your signage and/or website links to be sure they are easy to use, and provide enough directions so that no customer will be left behind.

## **Use terms that are easily understood by customers**

Telling a customer to go to "X-Ray" when the sign says "Radiology" is a good way to lose a customer. Telling someone to "reboot" his or her computer instead of "turn it off and on" may be baffling to the uninitiated. Be sure you use language that clearly informs, not unintentionally confuses, your customers.

## **Inventory customer "anxiety points"**

Know the places that are particularly anxiety provoking for the customer and focus attention on reducing those stressors.

## **Research the specific drivers of customer satisfaction in your industry, product or service**

What customers want, need, and expect will continue to evolve. Be sure you understand what needs are driving your particular niche, and how you must service customers to keep them loyal.

## **Continuously monitor capacity needs brought on by customer volume, and adjust quickly**

"Just in time" inventory is fine, but not when it affects customer satisfaction. Be sure you understand your customer volume and are able to quickly adjust products and services accordingly.

## **Make sure services are integrated**

Each component of your business may be providing good customer service, but if all the pieces don't fit together well, the customer experience overall may be a fragmented, negative one. Teamwork is essential. Develop teams and use online workspaces that allow employees to collaborate from remote locations.

## **Reduce handoffs**

Look for opportunities to say, "I will handle that for you" rather than handing the customer off to someone else or having them go off on their own. If you must hand off the customer to another associate, whether in person or on the telephone, stay with the customer until that action has occurred.

## **If you raise the service bar, do it organization-wide**

As you make improvements in one unit or location of your business, you raise expectations on the part of the customer for the same high level of service everywhere. Rapidly transfer learning about good and bad service to points across the organization. Raise the bar for every unit of your organization and you will not risk customer disappointment if one unit or location does not meet their needs.

## **Make service excellence part of the culture**

True customer service excellence is more than a slick marketing campaign. Back up your customer service pledge with reality — or risk losing the customer's (and your employees') belief in it forever. Make sure that service excellence to each customer is deeply embedded in your company culture.



## **Strive for authenticity**

Many customers are irked by a practiced yet insincere, "Have a nice day" or, "How may I provide you with excellent service?" Learning specific scripts can help employees understand when some words and messages work best. However once these scripts are learned, like jazz musicians who learn the melody, allow employees to improvise.

*Continued on next page*

---

## Free Yourself to Discover Solutions

Solutions to problems are very often right in front of us – yet we don't see them. We fail to see them because we are too caught up in, or too anxious about, the problem.

Insight happens when we can step back and look at the problem from a larger perspective, and calm ourselves to open up to deeper awareness. When we do this, we tap into deeper concealed resources that are already available both internally and externally.

---

## Coach to Their Experience

When coaching others, don't impose your own life lessons. Rather, help the person gain lessons from their own experiences. Remember that although the lessons learned from your own life experience may be helpful, as a coach, the lessons you help others learn from their own experience are even more powerful.

---

### Contact Us:

For Leadership, Team and Organization Development Consulting and Speaking. Also for Executive Coaching, Process Facilitation and Customer Service Audits, contact us at:

(415) 387-4040  
2449 Lake Street  
San Francisco, CA 94121  
inquiry@wbwassociates.com  
or wbwims@cs.com

## Give employees the leverage to serve customers their own way

Believe in your people's innate service abilities. Employees will often serve customers better when they are allowed to use their own discretion, initiative, and creativity.

### Anticipate customer problems/desires

Don't wait for a problem or a request before acting. Try to provide customers with what they need *before* they know they need it.

### Respond to feelings as well as facts

People want to know you empathize and care about what they are going through. In certain settings (e.g., healthcare, personal loss situations) demonstrating emotional support is crucial. Customers are simply people who – like you - want to feel that their emotional needs are being addressed.

### “Great service means always having to say you're sorry”

An apology is critical for many customers if you have made an error or if they are facing a problem. Make mistakes a learning opportunity.

### Recognize cultural differences

Be sure that employees understand the cultural and language differences within your customer base, so that incorrect assumptions by employees don't negatively impact the quality of service provided.

### Recognize generational preferences

Certain too-familiar terms like “Hon,” or calling someone by their first name instead of the proper titles Mr., Mrs., or Ms. can be very offensive to some generations. Other preferences can be found in certain regions of the country, or among specific customer groups. Treat customers with respect from their point of view. Always show deference by being more formal, rather than too casual.

### Recognize that different customers have different needs

Determine what customers really want (speed of service, friendliness, information, etc.) and give it to them. Don't assume you know what true needs lie behind a customer's request; you may be incorrect.

### Reduce wait times

No one likes to wait—unless they are being highly entertained! Honor customers' valuable time by serving them quickly and efficiently.

### Respond back to the customer's issue until it is resolved

You may not yet have new information, but from the customer's perspective, even knowing that there is no new information may be useful and very welcomed.

### Keep customers informed

Tell people what is going on and why, whether it is regarding their health, their product order, their computer system, their flight, etc. Don't leave customers in the dark.