

Delivering Knockout Service

There isn't a company in existence that does not accept the notion that good service is a business advantage. Yet many companies do not provide good service either because it is too expensive, too complicated, or not perceived as sufficiently necessary (meaning the harm of not having it is not seen as outweighing the expense of having it). The delivery of knockout service – service that just leaves your customers satisfied and your competitors anxious – is not necessarily expensive or complicated. All it really requires is the desire to be service oriented and the will to get back to being people sensitive.

The irony of customer service today is that it is all electronic, meaning that even getting to speak to a customer service representative can (and usually is) a frustrating and annoying experience (Press One if you agree). Service has become a necessary evil instead of something companies deliver because they want their customers to be happy and they want their products to fulfill their purpose (because of pride of craftsmanship and the idea of a promise being met). To recapture customer loyalty and reconnect with our customer base we need to bring service back to the level it was in when companies wanted to show they gave a damn, and customers wanted to feel like they were important.

Before reviewing how to deliver knockout service, it is important to define it in its components so that it can be fully understood. Knockout service is:

- Reliable – customers know that the company will be there to do the right thing (that which is in the reasonable interests of the customer).
- Responsive – customers know that the company will respond promptly to rectify any reasonable issue the customer may have.
- Reassuring – the customer is pleased that its requests for service are met with a gracious and willing smile and not with a sense that the company is being unfairly hassled or inconvenienced.
- Consistent – the customer knows that the service level will be high regardless of whom within the company the customer is speaking with.
- Caring – the customer knows that the company takes its role as solution provide and the delivery of benefits to the customer seriously because the company cares about the success of its customers.

These elements comprise knockout service and are provided because a company wants to. The possible loophole that is “reasonable” customer issue is not used as a loophole to avoid correcting an issue. It is there to protect the company from unreasonable requests, which the company can identify as falling outside its mandate to stand by its products.

Delivering knockout service requires that your company adopt six habits that will enable it to meet the standards as set forth above. They are:

1. Pay Attention to Details

Often poor service is a result of a lack of attention being paid to details. Not only can't the right service (solution) be provided when the details are wrong, but making mistakes with the details also leads the customer to feel inconsequential and unimportant – so unimportant that you couldn't even keep the facts straight. Paying attention to details

also allows you to identify the best solution quickly, permitting you to meet the cornerstones of knockout service.

2. Be Genuine

Customers don't fear mistakes, they fear apathy. If you come across a problem that you are uncertain how to solve, be open and honest and work with the customer to find an appropriate and acceptable resolution. The alternative, trying to stall until you find a solution, will lead the customer to believe that you are trying to avoid delivering on your service commitment. By being genuine you reinforce your commitment through your honesty and the evident effort you are making to find a solution.

3. Be Polite

Politeness in service is not merely a function of good human relations. The idea of politeness in the context of knockout service is that a well placed "thank you" or a sincere "I'm sorry" goes a long way in showing how important you view the customer to be and how important the relationship you have is to you.

4. Solve Problems

Customers seek out service assistance when they have a problem they are hoping to resolve. They are attempting to bring the relationship they have with your company when step further by saying "I am having this problem, help me solve it". This is in essence an opportunity for your company to demonstrate its problem solving skills and dedication to helping its customers succeed. Your ability to serve as a problem solver will strengthen your relationship with your customers and have them coming back to you to assist in resolving additional challenges. This will translate into their buying more products from you.

5. Be Fair

Perhaps the most important aspect of knockout service, being fair is your company's way of showing its ethical backbone and the commitment it has to all its customers. The idea of fairness not only means honoring your word and keeping your promise, it also means treating customers as you would seek to be treated and using your resources not to avoid responsibility, but rather to accept responsibility.

6. Be Professional

The notion of the professional delivery of service is somewhat distorted in today's business world as most major companies not only use systems that make it difficult (and sometimes impossible) to speak to a service representative, but also outsource their service to third parties (call centers – many of which are overseas) that have little-to-no vested interest in meeting your company's customer service promises. These people have to operate within the confines of what appears on their computer screens and are rarely able to accommodate circumstances that fall into an "exception" category. Knockout service is professional in the sense that it is able to meet the needs of customer regardless of the circumstances and it is driven by people who have the incentive and pride on the line and who are driven to deliver great service because they genuinely want to.

Knockout service is not that hard to deliver. It is however a commitment. In today's business environment where the customer is increasingly taking a second seat to the efficiencies of operations and cost cutting technologies, the companies that embrace knockout service will rise above the competition and attract those customers for whom service is still an important aspect of the buy decision. And believe it or not, that means the majority of your customers.