

Customer service: Eight ways to nail it

By Don Crawley August 24, 2015 | 7:10 am EDT

When working with end users, customers, and technical support staff, often the most common feedback received relates to how much a support person cares or doesn't care. The simple act of caring about our fellow human beings is the starting point for providing great customer service. When you truly care about your brothers and sisters, your words and actions show it and the rest of your customer service skills just fall in place naturally.

Perhaps you've seen or heard research studies on customer behavior indicating that large percentages of customers—sometimes as high as 68%—are lost due to perceived indifference. In a busy IT department, it's easy to forget that providing excellent service involves more than just fixing the problem.

Highly competent IT departments can still run into performance problems unrelated to technical issues, but instead related to their inability to deal effectively with people. Sometimes, the problem rests with just one or two individuals. Other times, it's systemic within the entire department. Sometimes, the problems are not even related to actual performance, but perceived performance. End user perceptions of IT performance can be jaded by IT staff members who—although technically competent—appear not to care about the end user. Outstanding customer service includes making end users and customers feel good about their interactions by quickly creating a basic human bond.

So, here are eight ways to show you care:

- 1. Be on time and be respectful of the end user's time by getting right to work on his or her issue.** There are no good reasons for being late, only excuses. We're not late because the traffic was bad or the drawbridge was up, we're late because we didn't leave early enough.
- 2. Be polite.** Remember the manners your parents taught you when you were little. Say please and thank you, say you're sorry when you make a mistake

PROHARVEST SEEDS

AGRONOMIC INSIGHTS

(oh, and make it real, not just a half-hearted “sorry 'bout that”). Similarly, the correct response when someone thanks you is “you’re welcome” or “my pleasure”. Do NOT say “no problem”. Of course it’s no problem, it’s your job!

3. Dress professionally. Of course, different styles are appropriate for different environments. What is appropriate in a conservative law office would be inappropriate in a startup game development firm. Still, if you want people to respect you, dress like you deserve their respect and realize that’s a way of showing your respect for others. To get an idea of what is appropriate for your office, look at how your boss dresses. Some wardrobe consultants recommend dressing for the job you’d like to have.

4. Carry yourself with confidence. Even if you don’t feel confident, act confident. Look people in the eye and smile. Stand straight, walk with purpose. When you carry yourself with confidence and project an air of confidence, your end users feel cared for. Think about how you feel with different health care providers; a doctor who shuffles into the examining room and who doesn’t look you in the eye, doesn’t inspire much confidence at all. The physician who comes into the examining room, introduces herself, smiles, looks you in the eye, and shakes your hand starts the relationship on a positive note and inspires a feeling of confidence. It’s the same when you deal with your end users. Even when you’re just working on the phone, the way you carry yourself comes through in your voice. Plus, it feels good!

5. Be a good listener. Remember, being a good listener means you listen more than you talk and when you do talk, ask questions. To quote the late Dr. Stephen Covey in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, “Listen with the intent to understand, not just to respond.”

6. Follow through. If you say you’re going to do something, do it. If you can’t complete it as promised, be sure to communicate with your end user so he or she knows what’s happening. When you don’t communicate, your end users fill in the blank—and it’s usually not good!

7. Clean up after yourself. If your work involves visiting customers or end user’s offices or personal spaces, be sure to clean up after yourself. Like many of the other traits mentioned, this is about treating your end users with respect.

PROHARVEST SEEDS AGRONOMIC INSIGHTS

8. **Do good.** Get involved in your community. Help other people. The act of helping others becomes a way of life and it shows up in all of our interactions, whether at work or elsewhere. Plus, it gives you something to talk about!

Don't misunderstand the concept of creating a human bond with your customers or end users. It doesn't mean that you should attempt to create a deep and personal friendship. It's more along the lines of what happens when one person performs a simple act of kindness for another, even between two strangers. Most of the time such an act does not lead to a lasting friendship, but it does create a good feeling between the two people. It's the opposite of a perception of indifference. Additionally, it can have a ripple effect as both people share their good feeling with others. It's crazy to think about, but the simple act of caring and kindness today as part of your job in IT could change the world tomorrow.

Don R. Crawley is an IT customer service expert who helps IT and other technical staff members master customer service skills. He is an internationally known public speaker and author of "The Compassionate Geek: How Engineers, IT Pros and Other Tech Specialists Can Master Human Relations Skills to Deliver Outstanding Customer Service." For more information, go to www.compassionategeek.com.

PROHARVEST®
yield365