

Customer Service Q&A with Best-selling Author Lisa Mininni

From "Who's Your Gladys"

As an expert who teaches entrepreneurs to grow their revenue, what role do you believe that customer service plays in the overall success of a company?

Customer Service is a considerable game changer for any organization. With the world wide web at consumers' fingertips, they can go anywhere but chose your company. It's important to take care of this educated consumer.

With social media, their customer service experience can catapult your brand. Take care of a customer and get people talking about how great their experience is. Conversely, if you're not paying attention to customer service, it could mean disaster. Years ago when people had a poor experience, they told approximately 10 people. With Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, you may find yourself doing damage control with millions of people.

What is the mindset that helps business owners inspire loyalty and commitment in their employees?

Employers need to realize that job security and steady advancement with the same organization has forever shifted to career movement and development, which won't be tied to any one company but a series of companies throughout their career. What this translates to is that today's employees are looking for and will search out environments with continuous growth and development. Create environments of continuous learning and allow people to advance which may not mean moving to another level on the hierarchical organizational chart. Create non-traditional career tracks that are more in line with shorter tenures of today's workforce.

Gone are the days of hierarchical top-down authoritative management. Today's worker is expecting collaborative work environments. Employers have to be mindful that today's employees look for environments where they can actively contribute their ideas and are less concerned with titles or seniority. Cross functional groups even cross-generational teams (seasoned and entry-level employees working together) can help break down silos and inspire commitment.

Blending work and life are of utmost importance to inspire loyalty and commitment. Technology has made it possible to work anywhere at any time. Be open to the possibility of restructuring policies and procedures to allow flexibility in how the work gets completed.

What is your favorite bit of advice for anyone wishing to improve business relationships?

Ask, give and listen.

The best way to improve business relationships is to ask. Ask what is going well and what can be improved both internal customers (employees) and external customers. Regularly asking gives your customers an opportunity to say what's on their mind and the ways in which you can service them better.

The next bit of advice is to give. Give generously to your clients or customers. An unexpected discount, a note of appreciation, a free gift, or simply a thank you drives home that you appreciate them. Show them you care by responding to them timely, compassionately and fairly and you'll have them for life.

Listen. Respond to customer concerns, anticipate customer needs, and view feedback positively. Feedback is just feedback. Toss away the defenses and start looking at feedback as an opportunity to get better. Work to create collaborative work teams to help in solving the customer concerns without blame, shame or guilt. This approach is much more consistent with the workplace of today and will serve you into the future.

This issue of Q&A features the expert advice of Lisa Mininni, Best-Selling Author and President of Excellerate Associate. Lisa is the creator of The Entrepreneurial Edge System, a national program showing small business owners how to fill their business in record time.