



An Action Plan for Making Good Customer Service a Reality

Kirk Kazanjian

Just about every company you run across these days seems to talk about how great it is at providing an excellent customer experience.

Hotels, airlines, department stores, insurance companies and even hospitals all love to tout their ability to knock the socks off of everyone they serve.

Yet if you look at the array of broad-based customer satisfaction surveys that are out there today, what you'll find is that consumers overall are actually quite frustrated and dissatisfied across a wide spectrum of industries.

How can this be?

The answer is pretty simple: any company can market and promote that they are experts at cuddling customers, but very few ever get the formula for execution right.

A big reason is that most organizations never bother to put all of the essential building blocks in place to create a customer-centric culture. They like to talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

They also forget that before your employees will ever take good care of your customers, you have to first take great care of them. What's more, you must set up the right kind of incentives and bonus program that tie compensation to their ability to delight every person who walks in the door.

What are some of the key strategies used by companies like Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Southwest Airlines, Costco, and even Chobani Yogurt to create raving fans that you can apply in your own business?

Here's a good starting point:

1 | Think differently. If you want to stand out from the competition, your approach needs to be fresh and different from everyone else. One way to accomplish this is by putting a new spin on a familiar industry. For instance, Enterprise revolutionized the experience of renting a car by offering to pick up stranded customers while their vehicle was in the shop. Fred Smith similarly took advantage of inefficiencies in the airfreight industry to speed up delivery times for important shipments. And Howard Schultz found a way to turn an ordinary cup of java into an expensive luxury by building a sense of community into each Starbucks store.

2 | Stay true to your brand. A lot of companies try to be all things to all people. In reality, that's a great way to alienate a large portion of your customer base. Instead, focus on a particular segment that you can serve well. Chipotle and Taco Bell both sell burritos, but the experience at both chains is very different. Chipotle caters to those willing to spend up to \$10 for the chance to help build their own creations, while Taco Bell fills a need for Mexican food on the cheap. Similarly, Lexus and Toyota make cars on the same platform, and some models have almost identical features, but Lexus caters to those willing to pay more for a higher level of personalized service.

3 | Engage your workforce. As I noted, you'll never get employees to offer top-notch customer service if you don't first take care of them. This means hiring smart, paying well, and offering incentives that are tied to satisfying customers and thinking like owners of the business. You also need to empower everyone on your team to quickly solve customer issues, while managing employees with an empathetic approach.

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4 | Teach the keys to great customer service. You can't just order employees to delight customers. You must train them on how to do it. More importantly, you need to lead by example. Any commitment to excellent customer service has to come from the top of the organization and be demonstrated by managers at the highest levels each and every day. Employees will follow your lead. If you're good to customers, they will be, too. If you're not, they certainly won't feel a need to be.

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5 | Practice full spectrum marketing. My strongest advice to companies as it relates to promoting your ability to delight customers is this: don't do it. Well, at least not until you have mastered steps one through four above. The worst thing you can do is to begin touting your customer service skills before they are perfected. That's because it will set unrealistic expectations. Customers will come in fully anticipating that the experience will be perfect, since you've essentially promised that. It's far better to say nothing than to over-promise and not be able to deliver.

Having studied and written about the practices of the world's customer service leaders for many years now, the one thing they all have in common is they have mastered all of these traits. And having consulted for businesses of all types, I can tell you that they work across a multitude of industries.

Is this stuff easy to do? Absolutely not. In fact, it's really hard. It takes lots of work and, depending on your starting point, the results might not be evident for months or even years. But once you get it right, the rewards of doing this work can be huge.

As Jack Taylor, who founded Enterprise Rent-A-Car, is famous for saying, "Take care of your customers and employees first, and the profits will follow."

He should know. Enterprise became the number one car rental company in the world by following these principals. And after acquiring Alamo and National in 2007, those two brands saw customer service and employee retention scores shoot significantly higher.

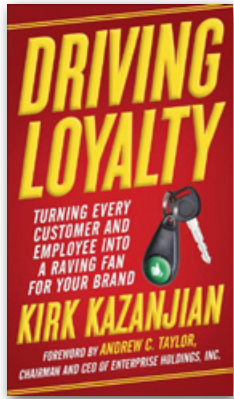
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Your goal should be to turn every customer who walks into your door into a completely satisfied lifetime customer. Lifetime customers are worth their weight in gold, literally. Research shows that completely satisfied customers are more likely to always do business with you, regardless of price and without even considering the competition.

So, be honest, how are you really doing when it comes to taking care of your customers? Have you put these big five strategies into place in your organization? If not, why not start today?

Getting there isn't easy, but I have confidence you'll discover that the journey is worth it and bound to be rewarding for your customers, your employees and you. 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Kirk is a leading expert on marketing, branding and customer service. The bestselling author of some two dozen books, he is a popular speaker and consultant on delivering excellent customer service, strategies for empowering and retaining employees, supercharging your marketing and branding efforts, and making your company stand out from the competition. Kirk has appeared on CNBC, CNN, Bloomberg, and many other radio and television stations across the country. In addition, he has also been featured in numerous publications, including *Barron's*, *Entrepreneur*, and *USA Today*. To learn more you can visit his website at [KirkKazanjian.com](#).

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