

Chapter 17

Customer Service





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Service technicians— industry ambassadors

Service technicians have more face-to-face contact with customers than anyone else in the industry, making them the industry's most important ambassadors.

What they say, how they say it, what they do, how they act, and how they look all determine how customers feel about them, their company and the industry.

Customers trust service technicians to take care of their problems and keep them comfortable. A good attitude and good people skills are just as important as their technical ability. Providing exceptional customer service is important and this chapter has tips on how to deliver it.

What's in it for the technician?

When a customer requests a specific technician, writes a letter of recommendation, or tells their friends good things about a company, it is because of their technician's technical skills, attitude and people skills. Raises and promotions are often based on people skills too; managers know which of their techs deliver good service.

Why extraordinary service is so important

Studies have been conducted to determine what impact service has on customers' attitudes. One study examined why

customers leave one company for another. Of the customers leaving, 66% said they switched because of a lack of interest by the company's service providers. Fourteen-percent left because of unanswered complaints.

One customer satisfaction study found that most customers do not complain. For every one complaint that's received, there are 20 unhappy customers and 6 very angry ones who do not call. Complaining is too much trouble and they do not know who to complain to. However, they do get even. Seventy percent of disappointed customers would rather punish the service provider than complain. They take their business elsewhere and then tell their friends about it.

The average upset customer will tell ten friends and 18% of them will tell more than 20 people!

The good news is that whenever customer's expectations are exceeded, they will be pleased. Satisfied customers will tell at least five friends about the experience. The only way to be sure that customers are saying nice things about a company is to make sure every customer is thoroughly satisfied.

All these studies have one thing in common. They were conducted prior to or in the infancy of the internet. Now an unhappy customer can make thousands, if not more, people easily aware of their feelings, both good and bad through online reviews.

The key to successful customer relations



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is to put oneself in the customer's place—to treat customers as you would like to be treated. Do the job right the first time. It means being helpful, friendly, thoughtful, tactful, and polite.

Customer service is a unique and challenging profession. Technicians are often the only link a customer has with the company. The few moments spent with a customer is all it takes for them to form an opinion—good or bad—about a company. What is said and how it is said will determine if the customer stays or goes. It also determines if they tell their friends good things about a company—or bad things.

It's a relationship

A company's relationship with its customers is very close. Many customers will buy from a company for as long as they live in their homes. Naturally, they expect more than a “take the money and run attitude”—they expect the company to keep its promises.

Customer disappointment is usually based on bad customer relations rather than bad technology. They won't leave if the burner breaks, but they will leave if their problems are not addressed or the company fails to let them know what is happening.

Many technicians tend to take complaints personally and then feel a need to defend themselves. It's important to remember that the customer usually isn't upset with the technician; they're upset with the situation. To the customer, the service call is an interruption and many of them must adjust their schedules, miss work and lose wages just to wait for their system to be repaired.

Keep promises

Breaking promises is the fastest way to lose a customer. Never make a promise that can't be kept. A service technician's job usually requires keeping promises made to customers by their company. The most common promises are appointment times for service calls. Customers want to know when someone is coming to their home.

Technicians must communicate with their dispatcher to let them judge the arrival times for their next calls. The ultimate beneficiary of good communication and accurate promises is the service technician. Isn't it nicer to work for a customer who is delighted that a technician arrived on time rather than one who is angry because they are late?

If, for some reason, a promise must be broken, do it as quickly as possible. The sooner a customer knows the bad news, the less they will be inconvenienced.

Moments of truth

It is helpful to think of customer relations in terms of “Moments of Truth.” Every time a technician comes in contact with a customer, they have a chance to make either a good or a bad impression. Each customer contact is a one-time opportunity to distinguish oneself from the competition. Successful customer relations mean making all the “Moments of Truth” good ones. If the service provider gets it wrong, they may be erasing all memories of good treatment. If they get it right, they can undo all the mistakes that happened previously.

Service technicians can make all their moments of truth good ones by being patient, understanding and professional.

If there is a problem, acknowledge it and apologize for the inconvenience. Be sure to use the customer's name, confirm that they are being listened to, and if authorized, give the customer a choice in the resolution.

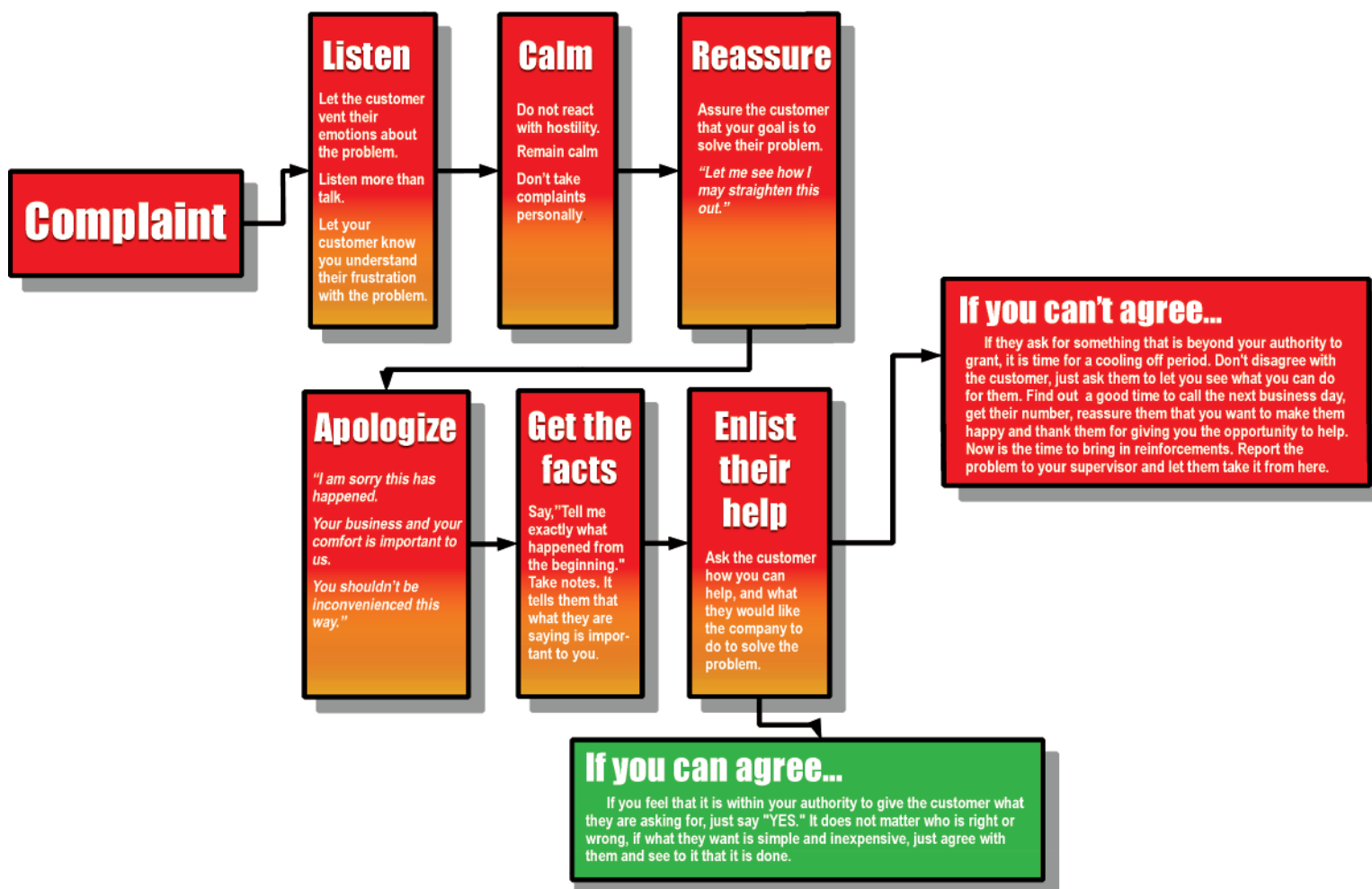
What customers want when things go wrong

Customers want their heating system to function properly. When there's a problem, they want it taken care of quickly. When something goes wrong, they want action, NOT excuses. They want the problem fixed to allow them to get on with their day.

They want respect for themselves, their property and their time.

Instead of quietly taking their business elsewhere, the complaining customer is saying, "I care enough to say something is wrong. I am willing to stay if I get some satisfaction." It may sound strange, but the first thing to say to a complaining customer is, "Thank you for telling us about this problem. Your satisfaction is very important to us and I will do all I can to set this right."

Customers want to be treated in a way that suggests that the company cares about



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them and about fixing the problem. Customers generally do not expect service providers to be perfect, but they do expect them to care enough to repair the problem with a minimal amount of inconvenience.

The steps to problem solving

- **Listen to the complaint:** If the customer is upset, let them vent. Be prepared to listen more than talk. Say things like, “I understand why you are displeased; I would be too.” Never disagree with the customer. Remember, this is not a personal assault. Do not react with hostility. Remain calm. The idea is to separate the problem from the customer’s emotions and work together for a solution.
- **Calm them, reassure them, apologize, and get the facts:** Say to your customer, “I am very sorry this has happened. Let me see what I can do to straighten this out. Tell me exactly what happened from the beginning.” This will get them into a rational, problem-solving mind-set.
- **Enlist their help:** Ask them what can be done to set things right. Ask them what the company must do to satisfy them.
- **Investigate:** Now is the time to thoroughly troubleshoot the situation to find the cause of the problem.
- **Offer the Solutions:** Explain the cause of the problem and offer the customer a solution.

Abusive customers—when is it time to leave?

At some point, an abusive customer may push too hard and make it difficult to respond in a professional manner. When they are in this frame of mind technicians are no help to the customer, our industry or themselves. If you start to become angry tell the customer that you need to go to the service van. This will provide a chance to

calm down, decide whether you can solve the problem or if you need some help from the office.

If all attempts to satisfy the customer fail, it is time to leave. Do not say anything that can make the situation worse.

Never criticize the work of others

Never criticize the work of anyone, regardless of whether they work for your company or another company. If the customer says something like, “Gee, the man that was here last time didn’t go to this much trouble,” explain that every problem is different and you are doing your best to solve this particular problem. If a fellow technician has made a mistake, take the matter up with them privately so they will not make the same mistake again.

Do not criticize the customer’s heating equipment. Remember, your company may have sold and installed it. If the equipment is obsolete, suggest an upgrade. The customer may be pleased to hear they can save money and avoid more service calls.

No one in our industry can build customer goodwill as well as a service technician can. Remember, techs are usually the only people from the company that a customer sees. They are the people whom the customer trusts with their family’s safety, warmth, and comfort. Always keep this in mind.

Image is everything

A technician’s appearance is important. Focus on clean trucks, neat uniforms, clean shoes, clean toolboxes and leaving the customer’s homes and heating systems cleaner than they were before. Cleanliness implies a higher level of quality in the service rendered. The importance of details cannot be overemphasized, especially details that are crucial to creating a positive impression on the customer.

Focus on the customer's heating system

Unfortunately, the condition of their appliance and the area around it is the reason so many people think that oilheat is dirty. To ensure a bright future for our industry, make cleaning-up of the heating systems a top priority. The customer will judge the quality of the work that was done by the appearance of their heating equipment after the job has been completed.

When a customer sells their home, the condition of the heating system becomes the company's best salesperson—or the biggest sales problem. The new homebuyer will look at the condition of the system and draw conclusions about what kind of company left their sticker on it. If the unit is nice and clean, they will probably call to set up an account. If the unit is a mess, they might not want to buy from the company that left this mess in their nice new home.

What do technicians look like to their customers?

What about their image? Is the service vehicle clean? Remember, a truck is a rolling advertisement for the company.

What about the inside of the truck? Customers might look-in when the doors are open. What about tools and toolboxes? Customers believe if a technician's tools are in good shape, they are probably a good

technician who will show the same respect to their equipment.

Check your appearance before each call and have enough pride to appear as presentable as possible. It is a good idea to carry an extra uniform shirt and a pair of coveralls. Keep a can of hand cleaner in the truck and consider using protective gloves when working with soot or fuel.

In a world of changing values and politics, it is important to avoid conversations on controversial subjects even if you feel the customer may agree. If the customer begins a conversation on these subjects, even if it affects you personally, redirect the conversation to their service issue so that you can resolve it.

Conclusion

The extra value that service technicians provide to customers is what sets companies apart. Professionalism and dedication are the most valuable things companies have to sell. Technicians make their company unique and special.

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Chapter 17: Additional Resources

NORA has compiled a library of additional technical resources for your continued education. Scan the QR code or go to the web address. Check back often, as NORA will continually add content as it becomes available.



You will find:

- Videos
- Technical Bulletins
- Instructions
- and More

https://Learning.NORAweb.org/customer_service

Hot Tips

for Successful Service Calls

- Be on time. Being late, without notification, is the quickest way to get off on the wrong foot with your customer.
- Prepare... ask the dispatcher if your company has been to the residence recently and gather appropriate information.
- Be careful where you park. Don't block the customer's car, drive on the lawn or walk through the flowerbeds.
- Set yourself up with a well-organized toolbox. This will reduce the number of trips you need to make to your truck.
- Keep track of your calls with a service card hanging near the system. Write the date, your initials, a brief explanation of what you did, the parts you used and the efficiency readings. This card can be a big help with troubleshooting.
- The most important service call is the preventative maintenance tune-up. It gives you a chance to look for potential problems and fix them before they occur. This is also a great time to talk to your customer about the possibilities of investing in new energy saving heating equipment.
- Do not let the problems of the previous call affect your attitude on this call.
- Some customers like to watch you work. It helps to explain what you are doing and make recommendations. Getting the customer involved may sound like trouble, but they deserve to know what is happening. You may be able to show them how they can avoid problems in the future. Involving the customer improves customer relations and may help avoid complaints.
- If an expensive part is broken and not covered by the service plan, get the customer's approval before replacing it.
- Always look beyond the symptoms for the cause of the problem. For example, a "bound" fuel unit is often a symptom of water in an oil tank and water in the tank may be a symptom of a rotted fill or



- vent pipe. Be sure to find and fix the cause, not just the symptom.
- Do not discuss one customer's problems, home condition, or cleanliness with other customers.
- Keep a clean, well-organized service truck (photo). It will go a long way to making your day more pleasant.
- Be sure to notify your manager about calls that require follow-up for immediate attention.
- Pay attention to your personal appearance. Clean and neat projects a professional image.
- Keep your "library" of service information and literature up-to-date.
- Answer questions from customers honestly and thoughtfully.
- The easiest way to upset a person is to discuss controversial subjects such as politics and religion, so do not do it.
- Never make a promise you cannot keep. Check first with the service manager, dispatcher or other personnel before making a promise to a customer.
- Concentrate on solving the problem at hand. Do not boast of the problems you have solved in the past.
- When you are finished, leave the areas around the heating system cleaner than you found them. Tell the customer what you did, show them the parts you replaced, and thank them for the opportunity to be of service.