

# Tips for improving customer service

◆ **Communicate with your employees in an assertive manner** — I am constantly amazed by the number of managers and supervisors who use passive, passive-aggressive or downright aggressive communication with their employees. What employers fail to realize is that how a manager or employer communicates with his employees is how they will in turn tend to communicate with your customers. For example, saying to an employee in a non-judgmental tone of voice: "Have I done something to offend you? I noticed you rolling your eyes during the staff meeting today" is a way to nip potential subordinate problem behavior in the bud. The tendency, however, is for the manager to either act passively by simply avoiding the employee or the manager acts aggressively telling the employee, "You sure have an attitude problem today." Or the manager acts out passive-aggressively by complaining to



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*Commentary*

other managers and subordinates about the employee but not directly to the employee. Learning to communicate assertively in all our communication takes understanding and practice.

◆ **Keep facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and tone of voice congruent** — Some employees think because their word choices are "user friendly" they are com-

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## Tips: Learn how to deliver negative feedback

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ing across as customer-service oriented. For instance if a bank teller shouts out "Next, how may I help you?" but never makes eye contact, smiles or acknowledges the customer, the message sent by the bank teller is a desire to herd the customer through as quickly as possible with little concern for any personalized attention. Companies who want their employees to be customer-service oriented need to start with the first impression.

It takes only a micro-second to make eye contact, smile and nod your head, but the impact on customer service is phenomenal. Another example concerns a patient who finds herself in the presence of a health-care provider who lacks communication skills.

According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of *New York Times* best-seller *Blink*, "people don't sue doctors they like." It often boils down to the tone of voice the doctor uses, and the most caustic tone of voice a

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tone of voice, then make a quality-care judgment.

#### ◆ **Learn to deliver negative feedback in a positive way**

— Being customer-service sensitive doesn't mean employees never say no to a customer or that employees are rugs to be walked all over. It's how to say no and how to deliver negative feedback that counts. If the first words out of an employee's mouth is, "No we don't offer that service," then the communication between the customer and the employee becomes strained. Employees must learn

tives in a positive and polite manner; 4) and show customer appreciation throughout the entire transaction with empathy and understanding. When employees are skilled at providing feedback, customer complaints simply diminish.

#### ◆ **Becoming skilled at change and adaptability**

— Some employees fear change and are deeply committed to doing it the old way because it has always worked before. It's important to get employee buy-in and allow the employees to discover through a specified process why the old way will not sustain the organization in the long run. Employers who simply mandate changes without giving the employees the opportunity to participate in the changes and get buy-in are doomed as the organizational changes are frequently sabotaged by the employees; who may later claim, the customers didn't like the changes. This requires an understanding that most people are creatures of habit and are somewhat change resistant. We don't like our

technologies. However, for organizations to better serve their customers, they must be change-skilled or the next organization on the block will steal their customers.

◆ **Improving business etiquette** — Many employees struggle with business-etiquette issues, such as employees coming to work with exposed cleavage, tattoos, pierced body parts or radical hair styles that may make guests or customers uncomfortable.

Managers or supervisors may not know what to say or how to tell their employees their appearance is inappropriate for the work environment. Having specific dress-code policies and making sure everyone follows them, including the manager, helps. Finally, knowing how to immediately and tactfully address these problems can eliminate them.

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