

“Laurie will take you from Greet to Great.”

—JEFFREY GITOMER

AUTHOR OF *The Little Gold Book of YES! Attitude*

THE  
greet your  
customer  
manual

YOUR COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO  
Welcoming & Retaining  
Clients, Patients, Members,  
Guests, Buyers...  
In Person, On the Phone  
& Online



WRITTEN & COMPILED BY

*Laurie Brown*

FOREWORD BY Tony Hsieh, CEO, Zappos

# PRAISE FOR *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

OUR CULTURE HAS NEVER EXPERIENCED a need to return to the basics of effective customer communications, as it has today. Laurie Brown presents a concise and compelling description of effective interpersonal behaviors that, if followed, will increase the chance of success for individuals, teams, and organizations. Whether your customer is standing in front of you, on the phone, in the next cubicle, or on your website, the skills outlined in this book are “must-haves” in today’s competitive environment.

David Bonello, Vice President, Learning & Leadership Development,  
Bank of America

A SINCERE AND CHEERFUL GREETING to each and every customer is paramount to the success of our stores. Laurie Brown’s comprehensive, easy-to-read book would be a valuable resource for any business owner, manager, or customer service representative desiring to win loyal customers.

Rick Hall, multi-unit Subway Franchisee

MOST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS think of their constituents as taxpayers, not customers. However, taxpayers, like other customers, pay for services and have expectations about customer service. A reputation for poor customer service can be just as devastating to a community as it is to a business. That is why I think every government worker should read this book.

Robert Bruner, City Manager  
Birmingham, Michigan

HAD AN OPPORTUNITY to look over “The Greet Your Customer Manual” and was surprised with how comprehensive it was! You have information that applies to jobs performed by the “front line federal employee” all the way up to the executives. I especially enjoyed the chapter that applied to supervisors and managers, a good reminder that customer service is the responsibility of everyone in the organization!

LeAnn Jenkins, Executive Director,  
Federal Executive Board, Oklahoma City, OK



*THE*  
**greet your**  
**customer**  
*manual*

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## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

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*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

DEDICATED TO:

My husband, Eric Keller  
*Who makes my dreams come alive.*

My son, Daniel Keller  
*Who inspires me everyday.*

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD *vii*

by Tony Hsieh, CEO, Zappos.com

INTRODUCTION **1**

STORIES FROM THE FRONT **5**

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF GREETINGS **11**

*Chapter 1* Definition of Customer **13**

*Chapter 2* Whose Job is It to Greet the Customer? **15**

*Chapter 3* How Quickly Should Your Customer  
Be Greeted? **17**

*Chapter 4* Attitude **19**

*Chapter 5* Know Your Goal **23**

*Chapter 6* Greeting an Unhappy Customer **25**

*Chapter 7* Meeting and Greeting Multicultural  
Customers *Michael Soon Lee* **29**

*Chapter 8* Greeting Customers with Disabilities  
*Gary Karp* **33**

GREETING IN PERSON **43**

*Chapter 9* Building Rapport *David Julian Xanatos* **45**

*Chapter 10* Eye Contact **49**

*Chapter 11* Handshakes *Patti Wood* **51**

*Chapter 12* When Not to Shake Hands **57**

*The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

GREETING IN PERSON *Continued*

*Chapter 13* Personal Space 59

*Chapter 14* Verbal Elements of a Greeting 61

*Chapter 15* Tone of Voice 65

*Chapter 16* Listening Skills 69

GREETING OVER THE PHONE 73

*Chapter 17* Phone System 75

*Chapter 18* Your Tone of Voice *Judith Filek* 79

*Chapter 19* The Words You Use 83

GREETING BY EMAIL 87

*Chapter 20* Welcoming Emails 89

GREETING BY WEBSITE 93

*Chapter 21* Welcoming Websites 95

MANAGING GREETINGS 99

*Chapter 22* Managing Your Employees' Greetings 101

TOP TEN TIPS FOR A GREAT GREETING 111

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 113

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 115

# FOREWORD

AT ZAPPOS.COM, OUR GOAL IS TO BUILD the brand to be about the very best customer service and the very best customer experience. To do this, we put our #1 priority on company culture. Our belief is that if you get the culture right, most of the other stuff, like delivering great customer service and building an enduring brand, will happen naturally on its own.

The Zappos culture is defined by our 10 core values:

- 1) Deliver WOW Through Service
- 2) Embrace and Drive Change
- 3) Create Fun and A Little Weirdness
- 4) Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded
- 5) Pursue Growth and Learning
- 6) Build Open and Honest Relationships With Communication
- 7) Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit
- 8) Do More With Less
- 9) Be Passionate and Determined
- 10) Be Humble

The number 1 core value is to “Deliver WOW through service”,



## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

which involves going above and beyond when doing a lot of different things, including greeting, interacting with, and communicating with our customers.

“The Greet Your Customer Manual” covers the various ways you can greet your customer—in person, over the phone, via email, and through your web site. We strive to greet customers not only effectively, but in fun and creative ways as well.

In a world where most companies are looking to reduce the number of customer contacts they have in order to reduce expenses, we take the opposite approach and view each contact as an investment towards building a long term relationship with the customer. For us, every customer contact is a branding opportunity, which starts with how the customer is greeted.

For example, during the holidays, I sang “Jingle Bells” as part of the Zappos phone greeting (very badly, I might add, but it brought a smile to our customers’ faces). Another way we keep things interesting is by providing an option for our customers to hear our “joke of the day” when they’re going through our phone tree menu.

When people come to tour our offices, we know every step of the experience is an opportunity to convey our culture—from the time our Zappos shuttle drivers pick them up from the airport, to the point they step into our reception area, all the way to the

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

moment they meet employees along the tour. It's not uncommon for an employee to stop what they're doing in order to give a warm "Hello" to a new face in our office. And it's not done because we're forced to, but because it makes Zappos a better, more positive place to be for employees and visitors alike.

If you'd like to learn more about our culture at Zappos, I invite you to visit our blogs: <http://blogs.zappos.com>

We never really get a second chance to make a first impression, so, here at Zappos, we like to make the most of every interaction we get with our customers. I hope this book helps to get you thinking about new and creative ways to greet your customers as well!

— Tony Hsieh, CEO, Zappos.com

# INTRODUCTION

“I walked out, and  
I will **never** go back again.”

NICK ENTERED A DEPARTMENT STORE looking for a new suit and had an experience you may recognize. As he walked through the store, he was ignored—totally and completely. It wasn't that the staff wasn't available or even that they were busy with other customers. No, they were all standing there, either talking to one another or doing nothing. No one acknowledged Nick. No one said hello. No one offered him any help. Sure, Nick could have approached one of these idle staff members and asked for help. But that was not what he did. Nick simply turned around, exited, and walked across the mall to the store's major competitor. There the staff welcomed him. He felt like an important guest—and he proceeded to buy hundreds of dollars worth of merchandise.

Later that night, when Nick went out for a drink with his buddies, he told them about his treatment in the first store. “I walked out,” he said, “and I will never go back again.” His friends all nodded.

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

As I am sure you know, this is not an isolated story. People turn around and walk out of stores, offices, lobbies, and restaurants every single day. They don't complain to the manager. They don't make a fuss. They don't let anyone in the establishment know they were unhappy with the service. They save their grouching for their friends. And their friends pay attention.

Recently I conducted a poll on the Internet. I asked, "Have you ever stopped doing business with a company because of how you were greeted, either in person or over the phone?"

Two hundred people responded. Here are the results:

77.9% answered "Yes"

14.7% answered "No"

7.4% were unsure

Before you begin to consider the repercussions of an unwelcoming or nonexistent greeting, put aside your role as a business owner or staff member and recall your experiences as a customer. Have you ever felt that the way you were greeted—or not greeted—affected your feelings about that business? More importantly, think about how it affected your behavior.

You know that greeting your customer is not insignificant. When a customer first approaches you, no matter what your job, you are the face of the business. Your greeting has a powerful impact on your customer's experience and impression of your

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

establishment. At your best, you are a gracious host. At your worst, your actions could mean the beginning of the end of that customer's patronage.

People now have an infinite number of choices about where to do business. More than ever, it is essential that you begin your relationship with your customer with a sincere, welcoming greeting in hopes of keeping that customer for life.

All too often, we lose our customers within the first five minutes. And we have absolutely no clue that we've lost them. Like Nick, they just leave, and they never return.

Even worse than that, customers like to tell their friends and family about their service experiences—especially their bad ones. They may casually comment to a few people about the good greeting they've received, but they love to shout about bad service.

So, if you think, "Oh, it's only one customer, no big deal," think again. Once customers start telling everyone about the lousy reception they received, the consequences can be exponential. A particularly bad story gets repeated from friend to friend. What's more, consider the impact of blogs. If a disgruntled customer decides to write about you, what might have been an isolated story can turn into a nightmare. The echo of that experience has the potential to cost you far more customers than you would

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

ever have lost through traditional word of mouth.

An effective greeting will make your customers feel welcome and valued; and, ultimately, your customers are the source of your income. Author and management consultant Peter Drucker wrote that the purpose of business is to create and keep a customer. So clearly, it is in everyone's best interest to ensure that your customer feels like an honored guest. In fact, if you do a good enough job, you may be able to keep that customer for life.

Every interaction we have or do not have with our customers affects how they feel about us. In those first five minutes, we are either helping to retain or helping to repel our customers.

The following chapter features stories from customers who were influenced by the greeting they did or did not receive.

# STORIES *from* *the* FRONT

**[retain]**

MY HUSBAND AND I HAD JUST registered our new car at the Department of Motor Vehicles (located in a section of the city that we're not too familiar with) and had some free time to grab lunch before we returned to work. After driving a block or two and seeing several places not open for lunch, we pulled into the parking lot of what looked like a converted fast food restaurant, now a BBQ place called the Limp Lizard (the sign was small and the exterior made it hard to figure out what was inside). The name seemed questionable, and I was a little hesitant to head inside.

When we walked in, the first thing we saw was a bar in the middle of the restaurant with some rough-looking regulars seated around it. I was all set to turn around and head out, but the female bartender (an attractive short-haired woman in her late 40s) warmly called out, "Hey, welcome to the Limp Lizard! Please come in and grab any booth or table you want. Are you here for lunch?" She was genuinely friendly, authentic, caring, and made us feel like we were visiting her at home, not at her workplace. After we sat down, she came over within the first minute to deliver menus, talk about the place, tell us who our server was, ask us if it was our first time there, take drink orders, and make recommendations.

## The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

The restaurant turned out to be a funky Tex-Mex place with great custom decor and excellent food for the price. We're definitely going back there again.

But we wouldn't have stayed had she not called out immediately with real warmth and genuine care. It's tough in the restaurant business to communicate that kind of sincere attention to your customer, and she did it better than anyone I've encountered in a long, long time.

— LINDA LOWEN

**]repel[**

LAST NIGHT MY HUSBAND AND I went to dinner at Wendy's. The second we opened the door, the guy behind the counter yelled out, "Will this be for here or to go?" Geez, I hadn't even decided between the burger and the chicken sandwich yet. As we sat there, every customer through the door got the same greeting. Not "Hi, Welcome to Wendy's!" or "Merry Christmas, may I take your order?" Most people looked as startled as I felt. After all, he was basically saying, "Don't let the door hit you in the butt on the way in."

— JULIE STURGEON

**[retain]**

I GOT A GREETING TODAY FROM Amanda here at the executive meeting place where I checked into my room. It is called Warren House and it is a delightful English Country meeting place for companies.

When I walked in the door, Amanda, the greeter at the table jumped up, smiled very brightly and said, "Welcome, Mr. Brock. We're so glad to have you here!" WOW! And they say the



British are more staid and reserved. Amanda demonstrated powerful professionalism with not only her greeting but the level of service to assist me in whatever I needed at the hotel. This is the way it is supposed to be. What a thrill to see it in action!

— TERRY BROCK

**]repel[**

AS A FREQUENT TRAVELER I stay in countless hotels. It appears that the overwhelming majority of the folks at the registration desk received the same lousy training. After an arduous day of travel, the last thing a “guest” wants to hear upon collapsing on the desk is the rather ignorant-sounding “Checking in?” or the even worse, “Last name?” Starting with a simple “Welcome. We’re glad you’re here.” would sound like music to the ear.

— DAVID GREENBERG

**]repel[**

THE FIRST TIME I EVER SET FOOT in the hospital (where I now work) after my son, Lev, was born, the person who greeted me treated me like a suspect—with diffidence and suspicion—instead of like a stressed-out visitor to a brand new state-of-the-art children’s hospital. Even after I told her (in my admittedly hysterical state) that I needed to find the NICU, she asked me “why?”—as if I were headed there (with my mother in tow, holding me up because I had given birth less than 24 hours earlier) to steal sick babies, instead of to visit the one that belonged to me. It was by the grace of a hospital volunteer that I got a wheelchair and a kind escort on the journey to meet my very sick son in the NICU. It’s been close to four years and with lots more memories—good and bad—after that one. That greeting is burned on my brain.

— MICHELLE MIRSKY

**[retain]**

I BELIEVE THAT NO MATTER HOW BAD your day is, your response to a phone call is very important. It has come to a point in our country, that when you actually get a real live, nice, helpful person, it stands out much more in your mind than the ever-present unfriendly voice on the other end of the phone.

I make it a point whenever I receive helpful and friendly service on the phone to let them know how much I appreciate it. I also apply that to how I answer the phone. I try very hard to not only sound professional, but welcoming. There is a difference, and both are equally important. I never want to give someone the impression that they are a bother to me. And let's face it, not every phone call is received at a great time to take it. The simple rule of treating people how you want to be treated sounds clichéd, but it sounds like a very friendly "Hello," as well.

— DAN DAVIS

**]repel[**

I TRULY DISLIKE, AS IN, I get really annoyed by the greetings that some hotels have foisted on those answering their phones: stuff like "Good morning it's a beautiful day at the (hotel name) in (city name)." Sometimes, they're even longer. Often the bored employee says it so fast, that you are greeted by a very long string of mumbled syllables, when really "Hello" would do just fine—so you could go about your business of making a reservation or whatever.

— KATHY SEAL

**]repel[**

IN OUR LITTLE TOWN IN WISCONSIN, there are four gas stations on the main drag, one of which my family and I will not patronize,

simply because of the way I was greeted (or more accurately, NOT greeted) over a year ago, when I bought gas. I used my credit card to fill up outside, but came in the store to buy some gum and a soda. The lady behind the counter not only failed to greet me when I walked in (I was the only customer in the place), she refused to acknowledge me or make eye contact at all as she was TAKING MY MONEY! On my way out, I said, somewhat sappily, “Hey, you have a great day now!” to no response whatsoever. The word clueless springs to mind—and, I haven’t been back since.

— JON QUADE

**]repel[**

WHEN I BEGAN MY CAREER (many years ago), I was trying to build my wardrobe by purchasing a few items of exceptionally high quality and the rest within my affordable price range for my salary at the time. On one shopping occasion, I visited a retailer of fine men’s clothing in Canada. Upon entering the store, I was eyed up and down by the clerk and was pretty much snubbed, since I did not have the “appearance” of dropping a large sum of money. As a result, I vowed never to return to that brand, and I have maintained that promise now twenty years later.

Unfortunately for them, they have not been in my consideration set for over two decades, nor have I ever introduced any of my three sons to them.

— MICHAEL MATTALO

**[retain]**

THERE ARE TWO LOCAL DINERS—both equidistant from our house, in opposite directions. We chose one, liked the food, and found

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

ourselves there usually more than once a week. We tried to build some rapport with staff, but it didn't seem to take. They were nice enough, but there was something missing. After almost a year of consistent patronage, we were still greeted with "Hello, how many?" when we came in the door. That was all. More than 75 meals there and they couldn't say, "Hi, it's good to see you again?"

We finally decided to try the other establishment for a while. It didn't take long before the "new" place became "our" place. Within weeks, the staff at the new place was acknowledging us when we arrived, offering us "the usual" for our beverage orders, and asking where we'd been if we were absent for more than a few days. Regardless of where we were seated, all the servers would acknowledge us with a wave or a tableside visit.

Five years later, we still think of this place first when we want to go out for a quick bite to eat. There are lots of options around us, but this is our go-to place. All because they not only greeted us with enthusiasm on our first visit, but remembered us when we returned.

— PAM WYESS

*The*  
FUNDAMENTALS  
*of* GREETINGS

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

## *Chapter 1*

# Definition of Customer

WHATEVER BUSINESS YOU ARE IN—health, legal, retail, hospitality, etc.—you need to properly greet the person who wants the services you offer. Because different businesses refer to their customers with different terms, I have decided to standardize the use of the word customer. In this book, the term customer will be used instead of client, patron, guest, patient, buyer, purchaser, member, enrollee, and so on.

First, let's look at how The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004 defines it.

cus·tom·er [kuhs-tuh-mer] –noun

1. a person who purchases goods or services from another; buyer; patron.
2. Informal. a person one has to deal with.

Now, the informal definition above states that a customer is “a person one has to deal with,” but I think it's important to amend this to say that, in dealing with your customers, you

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

want to influence them in a positive way. What's more, people you "deal with" include what I call internal customers, like co-workers, employees, and bosses. So, no matter what you call the person with whom you do business, please translate customer to whatever term best suits your situation.



## *Chapter 2*

# Whose Job Is It to Greet the Customer?

TYPICALLY, WE THINK OF GREETING as a task for someone like a receptionist, or perhaps a counterperson. In fact, some businesses consider greeting such a specialized activity that they hire people to stand at the door to ensure that everyone who enters is welcomed. However, I believe that it is everyone's business to make each customer feel welcome and valued. That means that greeting the customer should be regarded as part of everyone's job description. From the CEO of the company to the janitor—when you see a customer, you need to say “Hello.”

Some organizations use the “five-foot rule.” This says that any employee within five feet of a customer should offer a greeting. Even if you don't formalize employee behavior to this extent, everyone in the organization should be made aware of the importance of smiling and saying “Hi” to customers when they see them. Employees need to be shown that their behavior toward customers has a discernible impact on the success of the company and their continued employment.

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

*Chapter 3*

# How Quickly Should Your Customer Be Greeted?

HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN EXPERIENCE similar to Nick's? You walk into a business and you're totally ignored. You stand right in front of a clerk who continues talking to a co-worker, paying no attention to you. What was your reaction? Perhaps you felt invisible or disrespected. Or, maybe you just got angry and, like Nick, left the store. In any case, it's obvious that this is not a great way to treat people if you want to do business with them. So, the answer to how quickly you should greet your customer is—as you might guess— immediately!

I've always heard that it takes five seconds for someone to form an impression of you. However, in their article "First Impressions," published in the July 2006 issue of *Psychological Science*, Princeton psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov reported their findings, which indicated that it only takes a tenth of a second of looking at a stranger's face to form an impression, and that

longer exposures do not significantly alter that impression. If someone can make an inalterable decision about you in just a tenth of a second, you can see why greeting your customer quickly and appropriately is essential.

Of course, it's not always possible to greet a customer with your full attention. You might be talking to another customer or be in the middle of a phone conversation. But at those times, it is critical that you at least acknowledge people when they enter your place of business.

With a gesture as simple as a wave, a smile, or a nod of the head—or by saying, “I’ll be with you in a moment”—you can make the difference in whether your customer feels valued or ignored.

Greeting your customer immediately is both absolutely critical and remarkably easy. To get the right perspective, consider the sushi chef. Have you ever walked into a sushi bar and had all the chefs call out a greeting to you? It makes you feel welcome and establishes a fun atmosphere. They pull this off even though they are in the process of making sushi for all their guests. If a busy sushi chef can greet his customers while wielding a sharp knife, you should be able to greet your customers even when you are busy.

## *Chapter 4*

# Attitude

THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT of a good greeting is your attitude. No matter how hard you try to fool people, a negative attitude will be apparent. You'll give it away through your facial expressions, body language, and vocal tone, in addition to your words. Sometimes, you reveal a negative attitude through what you don't say or do.

Everyone talks about "good attitude," but what does that really mean? First of all, a good attitude is one that is appropriate for your position or business. Clearly, a funeral director needs to project a more somber attitude than a balloon store clerk. But both should be connected to their customers and concerned with their needs. Yes, even the balloon clerk.

For most businesses, a good attitude means that you are positive and upbeat, but in a genuine way. A phony, cheery greeting has never once been mistaken for a good attitude. You can't successfully paste an insincere smile on your face in order to mask your true feelings. You need to smile warmly and show enthusiasm for your customers.

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

I believe the best way to have a good attitude is to love what you do. Perhaps you are thinking, “Laurie, if you knew what I did for a living, you would agree that no one could love it.” Now, I understand that you might work in a difficult situation, and, until a couple of years ago, I might have accepted your perspective. But then I met Pete.

My husband and I had a cottage in Canada with a septic system. Understand, I’m a city slicker and knew nothing about septic fields. However, the interesting thing about septic systems is that you don’t need to know anything about them to know when they go bad. Well, ours went bad and we called Pete, the septic guy. If you had asked my opinion about who had a good reason not to love a job, I might have answered, “Anyone who works in the business of sewage.” Let me tell you, I was wrong. Pete doesn’t just like his job. He loves it.

When Pete came to our home, he sat down with us and drew us diagrams of septic fields. He even used the word “elegant” to describe the systems. In seconds, it was evident that he loved his work and loved septic systems. The funny thing was, by the time Pete had finished explaining them to us, we loved them, too. More importantly, we loved Pete. His remarkable attitude was absolutely contagious.

Of course, we can’t all be Pete, and there are many factors affecting both our circumstances and our attitudes toward our work.

Still, we should all consider emulating Pete. So, if you are having trouble loving your job, just try to spend a few minutes at the beginning of your day recounting why you are grateful for it. Even if the reason is something as basic as “I get a paycheck,” don’t discount its importance. Recognizing your ability to earn a living will have a positive impact on your attitude. The more things you can add to your list (fun co-workers, decent hours, short commute, among others), the more your attitude will improve.

### **Keeping a good attitude on bad days**

Yes, I know that there are days when it may seem impossible to muster or maintain a good attitude. You may have just had an argument at home, you may be feeling under the weather, or, perhaps, you had a difficult drive to work. There are a myriad of situations that might have negatively affected your attitude. So, what do you do?

On your way to work, spend a few minutes noticing how you feel—physically, mentally, and emotionally. As you take this survey of yourself, consider ways to discard whatever is making you uncomfortable. Although it wouldn’t be safe to meditate while driving, you can certainly relax by taking a few deep breaths. Also, if you feel stress in your body, isometric exercises have been proven to help alleviate tension. Simply alternate tensing and relaxing your muscles.

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

I have actually sung at the top of my lungs on my way to work to help me relax. Luckily for the other drivers, the windows were closed.

Find the method that works for you, so that, when you enter your place of business, you are in a good mood, or at least a better one.

What's more, helping your customers can actually help you. Focusing on your customer's needs instead of your own problems may offer you some relief. It is a positive, if temporary, distraction.

If things become difficult during the day, try to take a break. If you are sitting at a desk, stand up and stretch. Have a snack. Get a breath of fresh air—just do something to take a moment for yourself.

There will be those days when you must simply make a conscious decision to leave your negative emotions at the door. Remember, you can always pick them up again at the end of the day.



## *Chapter 5*

# Know Your Goal

KNOWING YOUR GOAL is an important element of an effective greeting. Be aware that if your goal is simply to get this first interaction over with and move on to the real business at hand, your greeting will seem rushed and customers will feel as though you don't want them there (and maybe you don't). If your goal is to grab as much of their money as possible before they leave, your greeting will have strings attached. Your customers will pick up on that intention and hear your greeting as if you were saying, "I'm being nice to you so that you will buy from me." Clearly, this is not the way to start a positive relationship.

Remember, Peter Drucker said that the purpose of every business is to make customers and to keep them. So, if that is what you hope to do, your initial goal really must be to make your customer feel welcome and appreciated. If you can truly see this as your primary intention, those final goals, like making that sale or even getting on with your day, will be far easier to accomplish.

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

*Chapter 6*

# Greeting an Unhappy Customer

NOTHING CAN RUIN A GOOD DAY faster than seeing an unhappy customer walking toward you. Maintaining a welcoming attitude and putting your defensive feelings aside can really put your customer service skills to the test. However, to make sure that you greet your customer in a welcoming way, you must get rid of those defensive feelings.

According to e-Satisfy, 20% of customer complaints are caused by employee actions, 40% are caused by corporate products and policies, and 40% are caused by customer misinformation or misplaced expectations.

What these numbers mean is that, when a customer is unhappy, it is statistically unlikely that you are the cause of the problem. Understanding this fact will hopefully make it easier for you to brush aside any feelings of defensiveness.

Still, the truth is that when an unhappy customer confronts you,

as the representative of the business, you must take ownership of the problem. Now, to be absolutely clear, this does not mean that you take responsibility for the cause of the problem, but rather that you must own the resolution of the problem. And, yes, even if the problem does not fall within your job description—and your reaction is, “Whoa, this is not my job!”—remember that a truly warm greeting means that you must help all customers get their needs met, no matter what.

So, what can you do?

The first thing is to be able to identify an unhappy customer. Of course, sometimes this is obvious, for instance when a customer comes up to you and starts yelling. But how do you identify unhappy customers if they don't scream? First, you need to be able to read the signs and signals that let you know the customer is unhappy. Generally speaking, you can identify an unhappy customer through a few clues:

### **Tone of voice**

Our tone of voice conveys our emotions. Listen for tension or anger, however subtle, in the tone. If you are not naturally good at hearing the emotion in the tone of someone's voice, start practicing while watching TV. Close your eyes. Don't look at the picture. Just listen to the dialogue, and see if you can start sensing how the characters really feel.

## **Rate of speech**

If you know your customer, a change in normal rate of speech is a pretty good clue that there is a problem. But if you don't know the customer, a non-foolproof method might be that your customer is speaking either very slowly or very fast. These extremes may alert you to a possible issue, but be aware that the rate of speech can stay constant even if someone is angry.

## **Body language**

Sometimes, you can see that customers are unhappy by body language. If your customer is showing tension in the neck and shoulder area, it may be a sign of anxiety. The customer's gestures may seem stiff or jerky, with arms crossed or hands stiffly shoved in pockets.

## **Pace of approach**

How a customer approaches you can tip you off to an issue. A stiff brisk walk may be a warning that you are about to be told off.

## **Words**

Obviously, some customers make it very clear that they are unhappy by simply stating what the problem is, but when they don't, look for such words as "It seems that ..." or even "Well, I expected ..." These can mean that an issue is a big deal to the customer, even if it seems minor to you.

Of course, identifying the unhappy customer is just the first part

of the task. Once you recognize that your customer is unhappy, what should your greeting be? A warm “Hello, how can I help you?” is appropriate (even though you may find that this greeting is not well received). The next step is to acknowledge the problem. You might say, “You seem to be upset. What can I do to help you?”

Once you’ve reached out in a genuine way, you simply need to listen. (You may want to review the section on listening.) Make sure you don’t start to solve the problem until you have let the customer have his or her say. Show the customer that you are actively listening and confirm your understanding of the problem by nodding or saying “OK” or “I see.” Ask questions to clarify what you are hearing. Once the customer has finished describing the issue, you need to apologize with empathy. Remember, saying “I am sorry” does not mean that you are saying you created the problem. It only means that you are sorry for the customer’s inconvenience. As the representative of the business, you are assuring the customer that the business sees his or her satisfaction as primary.

Even though you might find it difficult to apologize if you didn’t create the problem or if the customer is acting in an obnoxious way, it is still essential to say those words—and, of course—to mean them.

*Chapter 7*

# Meeting and Greeting Multicultural Customers

By Michael Soon Lee, MBA

BUILDING RAPPORT WITH CULTURALLY DIVERSE CUSTOMERS is not the same as with Anglo Americans. In this country, we assume everyone wants to be greeted with a firm handshake, a broad smile and direct eye contact, but this is not necessarily true for people from outside the United States.

For instance, touching some customers in any way can be extremely offensive. Simply shaking the hand or touching the shoulder of traditional Middle Eastern or Japanese women can be the equivalent of assault in their country. This is why it's crucial to let the customer take the lead rather than assuming how anyone wants to be greeted.

When meeting a new customer, hesitate for a moment after introducing yourself and see what kind of greeting he or she offers you. Most multicultural men will give you a handshake

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

but may also bow to you at the same time, and you should do likewise. Others may hug you and even kiss you on both cheeks; so again, let them do what comes naturally rather than assuming they want to be greeted with a handshake.

American men, in particular, are not used to being hugged by strangers. We are especially uncomfortable having other men kiss us on the cheeks, but you should never turn away. If you do, there is a strong likelihood that one of those kisses could land on your lips! This would be exceedingly embarrassing for both parties.

Next, when meeting a couple for the first time, be aware of how you greet the female. If you shake the hand of the male then drop your hand to your side when turning to the woman, so you don't force her to shake your hand, which may be against her culture or religion. If she extends a hand then by all means shake it, but more likely she will just nod at you and you should do likewise.

While this seems like a small adjustment, it speaks volumes about your sensitivity to people from other cultures. By letting customers do what comes naturally to them, your relationship will develop much more quickly and comfortably for all concerned.

Another cultural difference you should be aware of is that personal space varies among cultures. In the United States, we are used to shaking hands and then standing about two-and-a-half feet apart. This is not always comfortable for some people



from more formal countries like Japan, where they bow or shake hands and then take a step back. When this happens to an American, we feel difficulty in communicating across a distance that seems like the Grand Canyon, so we step forward. If you've ever had your personal space violated you know how uncomfortable this can feel, so a Japanese person will naturally step back to reestablish a more comfortable distance for them. You can easily see how this could result in your "chasing" the customer all over the store or office!

Other cultures may prefer to stand closer than Americans when communicating. Among these are the Middle Easterners and many Hispanics, who will often hug you and simply stand at that distance. This is much too close for most Americans so we naturally step back to a safer distance. Of course, this is probably too far away for the other party so they naturally step forward violating our own personal space. If this continues they will steadily chase you all over your establishment. Obviously, this makes communications difficult and uneasy. It also does not start your relationship on a very positive note.

Smiles convey different meanings in different cultures. In America we interpret the gesture as being friendly, while in many parts of the world people smile to cover over grief, hide embarrassment or conceal the fact that they don't know the answer to some question. Too much smiling on your part can imply that we are engaged in one or all of these behaviors.

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

Greeting others with direct eye contact is assumed to be a sign of honesty and sincerity in America. However, in many other cultures around the world, direct eye contact is rude and intrusive. To show respect for others, these people avert their eyes by looking down. Unfortunately, many people in this country interpret this as a sign of disrespect, which is obviously the opposite of what was intended. If a customer looks down, simply do the same.

Learning about cultural differences can not only be interesting but profitable, as well. Think about how many people are silently turning away business by not being sensitive to other people's cultural beliefs. On the other hand, by adjusting the way we behave to be more comfortable for them, you will find people from diverse cultures to be very loyal and interesting customers.

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*Chapter 8*

# Greeting Customers With Disabilities

By Gary Karp

WHEN YOU GREET A CUSTOMER WITH A DISABILITY, are you afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing? Perhaps you're a little uncomfortable with the fact of it, simply for not having much experience encountering a person with a visible or declared impairment. Maybe your company has issued some guidance for serving customers with disabilities, so you're doing your best to follow the rules, but it feels unnatural.

You want to do the right thing. He or she, after all, is a customer, and your job is to meet his or her needs while you help the company's bottom line or earn a commission on a sale. But you don't want to seem to be trying too hard, nor do you want to fail to acknowledge his or her disability in some (unknown) manner that might be important. My, this gets so complicated! What's a well-intentioned customer support professional to do? Here's the simple answer: relax.

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Your customers with disabilities are customers first. Defining them primarily by their disabilities is exactly the way you are most likely to fail to serve them—or drive away their business. You don't have to carry so much responsibility for knowing the right thing to do. If you treat them differently from any other customer you are likely to treat them in a patronizing manner.

We are in an era of dramatic emergence for people with disabilities. They have historically been limited not so much by their disabilities as by the physical environment and social attitudes. Now the obstacles are falling away and possibilities are expanding historically for a wide range of people. They are increasingly active and independent, educated and mobile—and flush with money to spend. Their disposable income is currently estimated at over \$80 billion in the United States. People with disabilities represent a real, substantial and growing market segment.

Our culture errs dramatically on the side of a charitable—and, honestly, demeaning—view of people with disabilities as objects of need, as people we must take care of. As a customer service professional you're well advised to explore your own assumptions about disability, which you understandably absorbed from the prevailing stereotypes. Assume you've got it wrong, and you're off to a good start.

So, again, start with this simple “just relax” rule, and you'll get it right most of the time. That said, it's worth going into some

more detail, but everything that follows is based on the same principles: they are people first, their independence is precious to them, and they don't want to be treated any differently than any other customer.

OK, there is one exception to that last point. They need special treatment only if their disability has some real impact on the business process you are in together. And if that's the case, they'll let you know what they need.

A very common—and substantial—disability etiquette mistake is to think you must demonstrate your understanding of or sympathy for their disability. They don't need to hear about the two weeks you spent in a wheelchair or your Aunt Gladys who is blind but is “so amazing.” People with disabilities hear this kind of stuff all the time, and, frankly, it gets a little old. More to the point, it means you're making their disability primary in the relationship. It's not. It only needs to be addressed if it actually needs to be addressed.

People with disabilities care deeply about their independence. Exactly because they've lost some degree of control in their lives, the control they have is that much more precious to them. This makes the greeting more delicate because they don't want to be helped in ways that they don't need to be helped. They need you to support their need as a customer, but what are the rules for “helping” in ways you think their disability might require?

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Do you open the door for a person using a wheelchair? Do you automatically carry a bag or package? Do you leap to pick up something that might have dropped on the floor? Do you try to complete a sentence for someone with a speech impairment? People with disabilities live in a world that assumes they need help and are fussed over. It often feels invasive to them, so how you handle this will influence their customer loyalty to you.

The solution here is simple, too. Never impose help, which robs your customer of the control which is particularly precious to them. If, after observing and considering, you think they need help, by all means offer. Then accept their answer, whatever it is. If they take your offer or make the request themselves, they will tell you what to do. Treat them as experts in how they do what they do. Keep them in control. They'll feel respected and you'll win their loyalty as a customer. Besides, if you run to open a door for them, try to complete a sentence, or perform any other such gesture, you're as likely to get in their way as actually help!

Many people have invisible disabilities, which could range from hearing or vision loss to environmental sensitivities or a temporary illness. Generally, they will not identify the disability unless it somehow impacts your interaction.

A deaf person, for instance (who, by the way, is unlikely to identify as a "person with a disability"; there is a distinct Deaf culture) is likely to have some degree of hearing, possibly with

the support of hearing aids. Many are capable of lip reading. They need to be able to see your mouth, and they need you to speak normally: they can't read your lips if you're trying to speak more precisely for their sake. And if you speak loudly you'll only create static in their hearing aid, which is tuned for normal speech. Get the theme here? Relax. Be normal. Just stick to the usual, and if they need to let you know that they have to see your lips to understand you, they'll tell you.

Blind people can tell if you're facing them when you speak. There might not be actual eye contact going on, but they can judge from the sound of your voice if you're talking directly to them or not. Never touch a blind person, whose balance is more sensitive because they can't see. You could cause them to fall. A blind person needs information—"There is a chair ten feet ahead of you," "Andrea has just come into the room," "I'm offering my hand to shake," and so on. Yelling "Look out!" doesn't do them any good.

Always interact directly with your customer. Never address a companion on behalf of a person with an apparent disability. You will never go wrong speaking to the customer, and if there is a communication issue, their companion will let you know. This is a far better mistake to make than to address the companion of someone fully able to speak for themselves—another common disability experience. This is also true for sign language interpreters. Their job is to be transparent, to simply translate and

voice for their deaf companion or client. Simple: always keep your attention on the customer.

Deaf people have access to some pretty cool technology. Email has been a huge liberation of communication in the Deaf community. They also have access to “relay services.” You might receive a phone call from a relay operator who will announce they are calling on behalf of a deaf customer (or a customer with a speech impairment that the operator is trained to understand). The customer and the operator might be communicating through a TTY device, or a web-based video connection through which they sign to each other. The operator is simply voicing for your customer, so you would speak as if the customer was like any other caller, never addressing the operator.

As a wheelchair user, one of my pet faux pas is the ticket agent on the phone who responds to a request for two tickets to a show by confirming the request for “one wheelchair and one attendant seat.” First of all, the wheelchair is not attending the show, the wheelchair user is attending the show. Next, their “attendant” might well be an intimate partner, making the characterization particularly inappropriate, or even insulting. The assumption is that a wheelchair user always needs someone along to help. This is far more the exception than the rule. Stick to “companion.”

OK, so it is possible to say the wrong thing. The language of



disability can feel like a mine field. How is one to relax if any word out of your mouth could put someone off?

Guess what? There is a simple solution: use “people-first language.” They are “people with disabilities.” A “woman with hearing loss.” A “man with a spinal cord injury.” And so on. You’ll never lose with this. The person first, not the disability.

We are in the habit of using a lot of negative language without realizing it. “Sufferer,” “victim,” a “problem,” and the ubiquitous “wheelchair-bound.” These imply that, by definition, the disability is a source of suffering and loss and a compromised quality of life. This is not the way your customers with disabilities think of themselves. Always err on the side of positive, active, people-first language. You’ll never lose with “wheelchair user” or “person with diabetes.” Everyday language is totally OK. A wheelchair user won’t be upset if you say “walk,” nor will a blind person fall into a heap of grief and tears if you ask them if they can see what you mean. Relax.

If you are operating an office or store where people with disabilities will come to you as customers, your commitment to an accessible setting will earn great loyalty. Failing this will surely drive off any return business—if not send them out the door on their first visit.

Provide clear passage for wheelchairs. Three feet of width is

usually plenty, allowing for turning radius at corners. Keep extraneous promotional displays and unpacked boxes out of the aisles. Maintain space between movable stock handling units. Don't use the path to the restroom as storage space, such as for high chairs in a restaurant. If there is an accessible table in your café, don't put chairs all around it. Make sure doors can open to at least a ninety degree angle without too much spring tension or a high threshold or else wheelchair users will not be able to get through them without help—a classic example of unnecessarily forced dependency.

“But I'll be glad to help them,” you might answer. From your perspective this feels like service. From the point of view of your customer with a disability the answer is “I don't want help for something I should be able to do myself—and faster than having to wait for you and explain what I want.” If you have a display blocking an aisle, don't offer to help get something for them. Remove the obstacle so they can get it for themselves.

### **Preserve independence**

People with disabilities want as much choice as possible, understanding full well that their disability presumes some degree of limited options. Restaurant hosts commonly put a wheelchair user at the table closest to the door—often the noisiest and most trafficked spot, not to mention furthest from the nice views out the windows. With the intent to make it easier (as if a wheelchair user can't travel another thirty feet without dropping

from exhaustion!) you have denied your customer choice—and a comparative level of service afforded everyone else. An even deeper question; is the closest table being offered to make it easier for the customer, or because it is too much trouble for you to maintain a path through the restaurant that would afford a wheelchair user the choices they value?

Hopefully, you're picking up the consistent theme here. The modern person with a disability is a whole, active person looking to live as full a life as possible, pursuing their individual interests and priorities just like any customer who comes your way, expecting equal service and respect for their dollars. Yet they live in a world that still widely misunderstands this, regularly falling into the same old grooves of disability stereotypes that sees them as either tragic or heroic figures who need special treatment, rather than individuals born of the same cloth of personality and quirk from which we are all cut. The businesses who learn this simple truth of “people with disabilities are just people” will win their loyalty—and disposable dollars—as appreciative and referring customers.

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# GREETINGS *in* PERSON

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*Chapter 9*

# Building Rapport

By David Julian Xanatos

RAPPORT, WHEN OBSERVED IN NATURAL SETTINGS, consists of similar behaviors and seemingly shared ideas. Rapport creates an unconscious impression that “this person is just like me”—and we tend to like people who are like us.

When people are in rapport, there tends to be a similarity of body posture and movements, ways of expression, voice tone and tempo, etc. Watch two people sometime who are obviously having a great conversation and you’ll see these things in action. When one shifts position slightly, the other will respond with a similar shift. If one leans forward, soon after, so will the other. There’s a pace at which one will take a sip of a drink, then the other, etc.

Knowing this consciously, now, you can begin to imagine how you might generate better rapport with someone you wish to get to know better, or to create rapport in a sales situation, etc. Dressing similarly to the person(s) you will be interacting with

is a good start. Stand or sit in a similar posture, but be sure to avoid mimicry—we have a built-in mimic detector, and people will at the least think you're a bit touched, and at worst be quite offended, if they feel mimicry coming from you. Remember to approximate a behavior, not duplicate it.

Good examples of what is referred to as Crossover Mirroring are things such as: if they scratch their nose, you adjust your glasses; if they tap their foot, you tap your thumb on your arm (or side, or something appropriate!) very lightly.

Matching Breathing is one of the most powerful rapport tools you have available. You can begin to generate an unconscious rapport with someone across a room by simply matching their breathing rate with yours, or with a crossover analog such as rocking slightly in sync with their breathing or slightly nodding your head in sync with their breathing, etc. This is often a process you will want to begin as far in advance of your actually interacting with the person as is reasonably possible.

Words are another powerful thing to match. People who use visual words to relate their thoughts are thinking in pictures, so speak to them in their language; they will find you to be a bright person who shines at conversation, and will likely be more willing to shed light on any subject you may have questions on.

People who speak using auditory words will really click with



you if you use words that resonate with their way of listening to their world. They will likely sense that you are really in tune with them, and will report having a harmonious conversation with you if asked.

People who speak using kinesthetic words (feeling oriented) will feel they are standing on more solid ground with you if you give them wording they can get a firm grasp on. They enjoy having a concrete foundation on which to build a close bond and can then feel balanced enough to take the next steps forward.

There are also many people who relate experience in what is defined as “digital” language, language that is devoid of sensory-oriented references. When speaking with these people, it is often of equal value to match their style of communication by representing your thoughts in a similar manner, editing your style to match this very digitized method of information interchange.

## **Summary**

Appearance; Voice Tone, Tempo; Posture and Movements; Wording of Speech. To create rapport with someone, make all of these “output channels” approximate the output channels of the person you are interacting with, without mimicry. Use your sensory acuity to get feedback about whether you are doing the right thing, too much, or too little. Continue to do the things that increase rapport; stop doing the things that decrease rapport!

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

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*Chapter 10*

# Eye Contact

YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT EYE CONTACT IS. You've had conversations with someone who wouldn't look you in the eye. You can still remember how that felt. Somewhere in your brain, warning lights went off. It took less than a split second for you to go from a feeling to a judgment, which goes something like this: "Wait a minute. He's not making eye contact. Something is wrong here. Aha! He must be lying." This negative response is so automatic that, even if the person who avoids eye contact is telling you the truth, you still feel uncomfortable. We simply all need that person-to-person connection.

## **Tips on how to make winning eye contact**

For most of us, direct eye contact with another person feels comfortable for about three to six seconds. If it lasts longer than that, it can be perceived as staring, which has the opposite effect of the one you were hoping for. Staring can make your customer feel guarded and uncomfortable.

The easiest way to add a feeling of warmth to your eye contact is to smile. This will actually change the look of your eyes. You

need to stay focused on greeting your customer. Don't dart your eyes around the room, because that will make your customer feel that you are untrustworthy or distracted.

My friend, and fellow trainer, Greg Jones, suggested this technique if direct eye contact makes you uncomfortable. Instead of looking directly into someone's eyes with both eyes, try focusing on the other person's right eye using only your right eye. This technique really does work! People still feel as if you are looking at them, but it's much more comfortable for everyone.

When you are talking to more than one person, you should make eye contact with everyone. Otherwise, people will feel that you are not paying attention to them. Be aware that often customers bring friends or relatives along to help make important decisions. Those advisers may be put off by your ignoring them. You should put your major focus on your customer while occasionally using eye contact to connect with any companions.

*Refer to the section on Meeting and Greeting Multicultural Customers to learn about eye contact with customers from other countries.*

*Chapter 11*

# Handshakes

By Patti Wood

THE RITUAL OF THE HANDSHAKE is powerful and rich with symbolic significance. It's something you do without even thinking about it, and it profoundly effects your relationships: you walk up to another person and shake hands. If you know the rules, you give a firm three-to-five pump handshake in greeting while standing approximately sixteen inches from the person. In business, you greet someone in this manner and then step back to a minimum of two-and-a-half feet distance, with no other touch in the critical first four minutes of the interaction. A handshake allows you to form a first impression of that person, or if you have met them before, to form an impression of them for that interaction.

In Western cultures, handshaking is used to greet another person and “seal” a contract or promise. The handshake is also the quickest, most effective way to establish rapport with another person. Research in the United States shows it takes an average of three hours of continuous interaction to develop the same level of rapport that you get with a handshake.

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

Why do you think we shake hands? We shake hands to show that we hold no weapon. It is thought to have started with the Roman arm clasp. One man would reach out his right hand, his weapon hand, and clasp just below the elbow of the man he was greeting. With this greeting neither person could wield a weapon easily. Medieval knights created the shaking part of the handshake because they knew that other knights hid daggers up in their sleeves and that the shaking would dislodge any hidden weapons. So basically handshakes are weapons checks: Are you packing any weapons? Let me check. Nope. Okay, let's talk.

This interpretation would also explain why, until quite recently, it was chiefly males who practiced handshaking. For men a strong grip signifies male bonding through a silent display of competitive power. But up until recently, most men, especially in the South, were taught to wait for the woman to extend her hand, because to extend his hand would be making the assumption she was carrying a weapon and that would be a great insult. It used to be that offering one's hand to a woman would carry the outrageous implication that the "gentler sex," too, could be dangerous.

Things are different now. Women across the country prefer men to extend their hand and give them a handshake. The majority say that when a man does not offer his hand, it makes her feel she is not respected or seen as an equal.

Although the handshake is rapidly becoming an internationally accepted business greeting, Americans shake hands more often than people of other cultures. The handshake can serve as an important verb in your body language vocabulary. Few things can create such an effective first impression as an easily given, gracious handshake. But unless your father took you aside and gave you tips as a teenager, most likely no one told you the ideal way to shake hands. Based on my research, here is the best way in American culture to have the perfect handshake.

### **The perfect handshake**

Walk up to the person with confidence. Keep your head level and your hands at your side. Be sure to keep your hands out of your pockets. Research indicates that we don't trust people with hands in their pockets. Make sure your right hand is free to shake hands. Always shift any purses, briefcases, papers, beverages or cell phones to your left hand before you begin the greeting.

Make eye contact. There is a substantial amount of research showing that good eye contact increases feelings of trust. Don't stare, but don't look at your shoes. Making eye contact as you approach lets the person know you want to interact. Men need to extend the eye contact for a least three seconds without blinking or looking away as they shake hands. Women need to be careful of holding eye contact for more than three to five seconds at a time with men they have not met before.

Face the person heart-to-heart. When you stand at an angle and don't face the person squarely, you are sending the symbolic message that you are not being straight and open. You may look as if you need to protect yourself, you do not like the other person or you feel the need to reduce the intimacy or the duration of the interaction.

If you have a problem with clammy hands, don't forget to wipe them on your handkerchief or tissue before you shake hands.

Strike out your right hand and arm across your body to your right. The forcefulness and confidence of the move lets the other person know you not only want to shake hands, you look forward to it. Make sure the arm goes fully outward as an arm held closely to the body indicates timidity and lack of confidence.

Make sure your hand is straight up with the thumb on top. The thumb on top is symbolic; it indicates you want equality in your interaction. No one person will dominate. You will respect the other person and expect him or her to respect you.

Stretch out and open your hand between the thumb and the first finger so that you slide your hand easily into the web of the other person's hand. Make sure the rest of your fingers are together with your palm flat rather than cupped so your palm can touch their palm.



Make palm-to-palm contact. Open palms symbolically show a desire to be open and honest in your interactions; not giving a person contact with your palm in a handshake is read subliminally as a lack of openness and honesty. It's why we hate a wimpy or limp handshake. It makes the other person nervous and he or she may wonder what you are hiding.

Once full contact is made, wrap your fingers around the other person's, put your thumb down gently, lock thumbs and squeeze the hand firmly. The pressure should be equal or at the most slightly more than the pressure you are given. Never grip the other's hand in a contest of macho handshaking to see who can hold the hardest or longest. You want to have a firm handshake, but the rule is to match the pressure or add no more than two steps in pressure.

The handshake is a potent element in communicating your personality and intent. It speaks volumes about who you really are and what you actually think. So smile and reach out your hand for the perfect handshake.

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## Chapter 12

# When Not to Shake Hands

FOR DECADES, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT to shake hands in order to establish rapport and build trust with their customers. However, there are a number of situations where offering a handshake can create more tension than trust:

### **Cultural issues**

For certain cultures and religions, handshaking is either forbidden or considered rude. If you are dealing with a multi-cultural customer base, learn all you can about the appropriate ways to greet and welcome them.

*Refer to the section on Meeting and Greeting Multicultural Customers to learn about handshakes with customers from other countries.*

### **Social anxiety**

For some people, the mere thought of having to shake hands creates a level of tension that can ruin the entire interaction.

## **People with compromised immune systems**

Many people have been told by their doctors that they should not shake hands in order to protect their fragile immune systems. There are also perfectly healthy people who are afraid of the germs that can be transmitted by a handshake. Here's an interesting fact: Back in 1918, the town of Prescott, Arizona, outlawed handshaking to attempt to slow down the spread of the flu epidemic.

### **Best practice**

Instead of initiating the handshake, wait until your customer makes the first move. Keep your arms relaxed but be ready to respond. If others make a move to shake your hand, you can easily reach out and grasp their hand in return.

## Chapter 13

# Personal Space

WHEN GREETING YOUR CUSTOMER, you need to be aware of people's personal space. We all have an invisible comfort zone. This space varies from person to person and certainly from culture to culture.

In *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Edward T. Hall wrote about his theory of proxemics. Simply put, proxemics is the study of the human use of space within the context of culture.

Hall named the four zones as follows (the specific figures are standard in American culture):

**The Intimate Zone** (18 inches or less). As the name implies, this distance is for an intimate conversation.

**The Personal Zone** (18 inches to 4 feet). This is a comfortable distance for friends. Unless you are quite good friends with your customer, 18 inches is probably too close.

**The Social Zone** (4 feet to 10 feet). This is a comfortable distance

for impersonal interactions. (You can see why the five-foot rule makes sense.)

**The Public Zone** (10 to 25 feet). The public zone is used for interacting with strangers. This is too far for any meaningful personal interaction. But be aware that people can still read your body language and make judgments from this distance, so even if you aren't communicating directly with customers at this distance, you are still making an impression on them.

The best way to tell if you have entered someone's personal space is to watch his or her body language. Generally, people have an immediate physical reaction to feeling invaded. If you feel that you are too close, take a subtle step or two backward.

## **Touching**

You have to be careful about touching your customers. Again, this can be a cultural issue, but as a rule, it is best to avoid touching people (handshakes aside). Although it may feel natural to you to put an arm around someone or stress a point by touching, this will make many people feel as though their space is being invaded. On the other hand, if your customer touches your arm, you are being given tacit permission to do the same.

## *Chapter 14*

# Verbal Elements of a Greeting

A GOOD GREETING has a few very important elements:

“Hello”, “hi”, “good morning”, etc.

“Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_.” (if a formal setting).

Your name, if you are the person that will be the one helping the customer.

“How may I help you?”, “How are you today?”, “Let me know if you need help.”

If you are simply greeting as you pass by, a warm “Hello” may suffice. But even if you are in that situation, watch the customer’s body language and ask yourself: do they seem to be lost or confused? If so, it is imperative to ask them if they need assistance. If your greeting includes “How are you today?”, make sure you really listen to the response and respond appropriately.

Recently, my friend Tania went to a store and was greeted with “How are you today?” Tania answered, “Oh, I’m having a really bad day.” Her greeter responded with, “Oh, that’s nice. How can

I help you?” Needless to say, Tania was offended and walked away upset.

This kind of rote response happens every day. If you’re not going to listen to your customer’s response, don’t ask the question.

Once you learn your customer’s name, use it.

If you tend to have a problem remembering names or their correct pronunciation, use them immediately. You can then silently repeat the name in your head, or, if you need to, unobtrusively jot it down.

Dale Carnegie said, “The sweetest sound in any language is the sound of one’s own name.” It is true that using a customer’s name can create a sense of intimacy. However, it can also have the opposite effect. Watch out for the following mistakes: Using the customer’s name too often. “Well, Bob, you can see that this is the perfect solution for your business. Don’t you agree, Bob? After all, Bob, studies have shown this to be true. And Bob, ...” Overusing your customers’ names may make them uncomfortable. It can seem like an insincere gimmick rather than a true connection.

### **Mispronouncing your customer’s name**

Some people have names that are difficult to pronounce or have an unusual pronunciation. In either case, it is almost always a



good idea to ask for the correct pronunciation. Then, once you've heard the name said properly, it's essential that you pronounce it correctly.

Customers may forgive you for not saying a name right when you're just learning it, but it will really grate on their nerves to hear it repeatedly mispronounced.

### **Use of honorifics**

Although American social interaction has grown increasingly casual over the years, it is still a good idea to use honorifics (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., sir or ma'am). This formal show of respect is invariably appreciated. If your customers want you to use their first names, they will tell you. On the other hand, they probably won't let you know if they feel you've insulted them with an overly familiar greeting. Of course, you must be the judge of what's the right tone for your business. You should certainly make an exception when you're greeting someone your own age and you feel that using an honorific would sound phony.

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

*Chapter 15*

# Tone of Voice

THE TONE OF YOUR VOICE carries the emotional content of your greeting. Quite frankly, you can do everything else right, but if your tone sounds insincere or sarcastic, your greeting will be ineffective or, worse, ruin your chances of doing business with this potential customer.

As Judith Filek writes in Chapter 18, your tone needs to sound “upbeat, warm, under control, and clear.”

How can you be certain that your voice conveys the emotions you want to project? If making your customers feel welcome is sincerely your intention, that will very likely come through. But there are certain elements that can affect your tone of voice:

## **Tension**

Any sort of tension will resonate in your tone. If you feel pressured, your voice may not carry the warmth it needs to sound welcoming. To remedy this, you might try the techniques mentioned earlier for adjusting your attitude. Try the isometric

exercises or take some deep breaths. Relaxing your body should soften your voice, allowing that warm tone to come through.

## **Your surroundings**

Sometimes our workplace can feel quite hectic and chaotic. Endless ringing phones or crowds of customers can make you feel frantic. Sometimes we mirror our environment, and our greeting can sound just as hectic and chaotic as our surroundings. If you work in a business that has this kind of atmosphere, try to mentally block the chaos. Sometimes, just taking a second to collect yourself will help you stay focused on the customer.

## **Focus**

No one appreciates a greeting that feels half-hearted or distracted. Certainly, if you are with another customer or on the phone, your brief acknowledgement of a new customer (“Hi, I will be with you in a minute”) may seem slightly distracted. This is generally not a problem, though, because people understand the situation. But, once you turn to that customer, if your mind is somewhere else, your tone of voice will reveal a lack of focus. This is where your customers may feel slighted. When you consciously give them all of your attention, it will be reflected in your tone.

## **Energy level**

Not sleeping, feeling ill, not eating well—these and similar kinds of problems can affect your tone of voice. While you might not

be able to change the causes, be aware of your low energy level and try to compensate for it. We sometimes feel as though we are doing everything correctly but may sense that our tone of voice isn't being perceived the way we would like. If that's the case, do a "tone audit" with your manager, co-workers, friends, or family. Ask them to give you honest feedback about how you sound. If they recommend areas to improve, make adjustments, and after a few weeks, ask them to listen and give feedback, again.

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

*Chapter 16*

# Listening Skills

LISTENING SEEMS EASY, DOESN'T IT? As natural as breathing. But if you think about how often you as a customer find sales and service people not really listening, you may wonder if paying attention actually calls for the development of certain skills. The answer is "Yes." No matter what business you are in, if you're in the customer service business, you must develop good listening skills. Whether you are a CEO or a technician, your ability to listen effectively will affect your greeting.

Here are eight simple steps to improve your listening skills:

## **1. Listen with your ears, eyes, heart and mind**

If you listen with all your senses, you will be able to get the full message that is being sent. Use your ears to listen to the exact words being said. Use your eyes to read the body language of the person who is talking to you. Body language is a more powerful communicator than words. Look for such clues as crossed arms, tension in the shoulders, and, of course, facial expressions to understand a speaker's true feelings. Use your heart to listen to the emotional content of the message. This is usually conveyed

with tone of voice. And with your mind listen for what is not being said.

## **2. Listen with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply**

Stephen Covey, in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, speaks about listening with intention. How often, when you're listening to someone, do you find yourself wondering about what you are going to say? The minute you are formulating your response, you are not listening effectively. Although the inclination to do this is part of human nature, try waiting until you have listened to the speaker's entire message. It's OK to take a few seconds afterward to consider your response.

## **3. Don't interrupt**

Not only is it rude to interrupt, it also keeps you from fully understanding what the speaker is trying to say. When you're excited, it's easy to barge in with your reply. The best way to combat this is to take a breath before responding. It gives you time to make sure the speaker has finished.

## **4. Stay focused**

There is often so much noise around us that we are unable to keep our focus. TVs, radios, computers, not to mention other people, can distract us from paying attention. But we can also be distracted by the visual noise that surrounds us. If you have trouble staying focused while listening, you'll need to create a



calmer environment. Find a quiet space. Remove the mess from your desk or work areas. And, believe it or not, you should avoid multitasking. It gets in the way of effective listening. If you're emailing, surfing the Internet, or engaged in any other way, you cannot listen with your full attention.

## **5. Take notes**

One of the best ways to listen effectively is to take notes. Unless you're on the phone, always ask the speaker if it's OK if you jot some things down to help you remember key points. Keep your attention on your customer, and just write down the words or phrases that will remind you of the most important ideas.

## **6. Confirm your understanding**

Sometimes we think we know what the other person is saying to us. But even if we both speak the same language, we can misunderstand the meaning and nuance of what the speaker means. If you confirm that what you have heard was what the speaker intended, you are far more likely to satisfy your customer's needs.

## **7. Spend more time listening than talking**

Always remember this rule. Even when greeting your customer, you need to spend more time listening than speaking. It will make the customer feel valued and welcomed.

## **8. Show interest in what the speaker is saying**

When you are actively listening, you need to make sure your

customers feel that you are engaged with what they are saying. Some people can listen effectively while not maintaining eye contact, but this will make most customers feel as though you are not really listening to them. If they don't feel listened to, it doesn't count. So you need to do something that indicates that you are paying attention. Nodding or making sounds of understanding (such as "Ah, yes" or "I see") can really make a difference. You should ask questions to clarify or confirm that you understand what they are saying.

# GREETING OVER *the* PHONE

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

*Chapter 17*

# Your Phone System

BARBARA WAS THRILLED. She finally got a brand new automated phone system for her business. She purchased the system to give her employees more time for their work. It seemed to her that too much of their time was taken up transferring calls to the right person and repeatedly giving out information about their hours or location. The automated system would allow them to become fully productive.

Sounds great, doesn't it? Wrong. It was a nightmare. Her customers, who were used to speaking to a human, now had to maneuver a difficult, confusing and sometimes truly impossible system. Some of her customers dealt with the new system but silently hated it. Some of them complained. Others just gave up and went elsewhere. The real problem was that Barbara lost track of what really mattered. She forgot that her customers were not in the way of her business—they were her business. In her effort to make life easier for her employees, she inadvertently made it more difficult for her customers to do business with her.

In a marketplace with so many choices, it is essential for you

to do everything possible to make it easy for your customers to do business with you. Any difficulty or obstacle that hinders or frustrates the customer may push them to run away without your ever having a chance to correct the problem. So what can you do to encourage your customers to remain loyal to you and not drive them away to your competitor?

### **Make it easy to contact your company**

Have your phone number clearly displayed on all printed and electronic media, your email signature line, your receipts, magnets, notepads and anything else your customers may keep. List your phone information in online directories, search engines, yellow pages, etc.

Another thing that makes contacting your company easy is a toll-free number. If you use an acronym for the phone number (for instance, 1 800 CALL USS), include the numeric equivalent of the letters (1.800.225.5877).

### **Make it easy to talk to a human**

Don't make your customers search for a way to speak to a living, breathing person. If you have an automated phone system, it can be extremely frustrating—often making it impossible for your customers to get in touch with that human being they know is somewhere out there. Consider reducing the number of prompts in your system. One set of prompts is the limit for most people's patience and good will. If you absolutely, positively must have

more than one set, offer your customers the option of speaking to an operator in each series of prompts.

### **Make it easy for your customer to reach the person they need**

Have employees take ownership of every call. If they can answer a question without transferring, have them go ahead and answer. If the caller needs to talk to someone else in the company, the person who has answered the call should tell the customer that he or she is going to be transferred, making sure the caller has been given the correct number in the event that the person gets disconnected or lost in the system. If at all possible, purchase a system that allows your employees to stay on the phone with the customer until the transfer is complete. As in any other business situation, have employees introduce the callers to the people they are being transferred to. The employee should provide a brief recap of the customer's needs and/or questions before politely saying goodbye to the customer.

### **Make it easy to be on hold**

Thirty seconds doesn't sound so bad, does it? But phone time is different from regular time. When you are waiting for someone to help you, 30 seconds often feels as long as five minutes. If your people have to place a caller on hold, make sure that they check back every 30 seconds to update customers and/or give them the option of being called back. Don't ask your customers to call back. Getting back to them is a way of acknowledging

that you know their time is important and that you appreciate their patience. And if you say you're going to call back, do it as soon as possible.

If you play music for the on-hold time, be certain that it is consistent with the image of your business. A better idea may be to play information tapes that tell your customers about your business or give them some ideas to improve their own lives or businesses without it becoming a sales pitch.

### **Make it easy to have a voice mail returned**

When customers leave voice mail messages, they expect to get a call back quickly. If employees need to be out of the office, or if they will be unable to return messages that day, have them change their voice mail message to not only indicate that they will be unavailable, but also to provide the number or extension of a person who can be contacted immediately.

Often, we are unaware of just how difficult and frustrating it can be to reach a human at our own business. If you think you have an easy system, try it out yourself. Have friends and family members call your number. Ask your employees to give it a try. Have them tell you what were the most convenient parts of their experience as well as which aspects were frustrating. Then fix the problems immediately. Make it as simple and convenient as possible for your customers to do business with you.



## Chapter 18

# Your Tone of Voice

By Judith Filek, President, Impact Communications

WHEN CUSTOMERS HEAR YOUR VOICE on the other end of the line, they imagine the person behind the voice. If they like what they hear in the voice, chances are they will perceive you as knowledgeable and confident. If they don't like your voice, it makes them want to disconnect or speak to a supervisor. Your voice is your best vehicle for making the customer trust you. To exceed customer expectations, your voice must consistently sound:

Upbeat

Warm

Under control

Clear

### **Understanding your voice**

All of us are born with a particular voice. It is our trademark. Most of us do not have a radio announcer's voice. However, unless there is a congenital defect, any voice can be improved by pausing and breathing.

## **Improve the tone of your voice**

Make sure you are breathing from the diaphragm. Many people are shallow breathers. This can cause the voice to sound strident.

Drink lots of water to keep the voice sounding pleasant all day long. When you talk on the phone, it is important to keep the vocal chords lubricated.

Avoid caffeine. It is a diuretic.

Sit up straight. Posture does affect breathing.

Use gestures to make your voice sound energetic. It is especially important to use gestures when you are tired. They will give your voice additional power and will help you to emphasize words or phrases to get your point across.

You automatically warm up the tone of your voice when you smile. Your customers will notice the difference. Keep a mirror on your desk and notice if you are smiling while talking. If your voice is particularly high or low, exercise the range of your voice by doing a sliding scale. You can expand the range of your voice by singing.

Tape record your voice and play it back. Would this be a voice that says “I care”?

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Practice speaking at a slightly lower octave. Deeper voices have more credibility than higher pitched voices. It will take getting used to pitching your voice down an octave, but it will be well worth the effort. It is also what on-air radio personalities have had to learn to do.

Get feedback on the tone of your voice. Ask your manager or a trusted friend.

Your voice sells people on your knowledge level and professionalism. It helps you to gain their support when difficulties arise. Make it sound the best it can by pausing and breathing and by maintaining it with good posture, big gestures and plenty of water.

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Judith Filek, President, Impact Communications. Impact Communications Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone 847.438.4480 or contact our website at [www.impactcommunicationsinc.com](http://www.impactcommunicationsinc.com).*

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## *Chapter 19*

# The Words You Use

IN ADDITION TO YOUR TONE OF VOICE, the exact words you speak have the power to make customers feel welcome over the phone.

### **Incoming phone greeting**

When answering the phone you should always do the following:

State the name of the business.

State your own name.

Offer help.

It is really quite simple: “Hello, Keller’s Widgets. Laurie Brown speaking. How may I help you?”

Each of the three elements listed above is important for different reasons: Saying the name of the business assures callers they have dialed the correct number. It also conveys a sense of pride in your workplace.

Clearly saying your name allows customers to identify you in case they need to follow up on the call. It also tells customers that you are taking responsibility for this interaction. Offering help shows that you are ready to serve the customer’s needs.

If a call is transferred internally to you from another person at your company, you don't need to repeat the name of your business, but it is important to identify your department.

“Hello, widget service. Laurie Brown speaking. How may I help you?”

### **Outgoing phone greeting**

If you are placing a call to your customer, you should always follow these rules:

State your name.

State the name of your business.

Say the name of the person to whom you wish to speak.

Say why you are calling.

“Hello, this is Laurie Brown from Keller's Widgets. May I speak to Levi Skye? I'm returning his call.”

### **Leaving a voice mail**

Often, when you place a call, you will reach your customer's voice mail. If so, it is best to follow this formula:

State your name.

State the name of your business.

Say your phone number.

Briefly explain why you are calling (Note: the more compelling the message, the more likely your call will be returned). Leave instructions about the best time to be reached.

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Repeat your name and phone number—slowly enough for someone to write it down.

And keep it short.

“Hello, this is Laurie Brown from Keller’s Widgets, 248...761...7510 (say the number slowly). I am calling to let Levi Skye know how to save \$100,000 a year on his widgets. Please call back this afternoon. Again this is Laurie Brown, 248...761...7510.”

The reason you should repeat your name and number is so that the listener won’t have to replay the entire message to get this vital information. Nothing is more irritating than having to listen to a long message a second time in order to get the phone number.

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# GREETING *by* EMAIL

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

## *Chapter 20*

# Welcoming Emails

SOMETIMES YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER with a customer will be by email. You may be the one initiating the contact, or you may be responding to someone's query. In either case, your message still creates an impression with your customer, so your greeting must be as warm and welcoming as it is in person or on the phone. Of course, with both email and regular mail, we have only the words we use to make that good first impression. We don't have our body language or tone of voice to help us.

Because email is less formal than a written letter, it has rules of its own. However, please remember that even though email is more casual than a standard letter, you must follow all the basic rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

### **Keep it simple**

Emails should be very simple. A good rule of thumb is that they should address only one topic. They also need to be brief, but be certain to provide all the information that the customer needs.

## **Make it clear**

Subject lines are an essential element of email. Be certain that yours is clear and inviting. Your customers probably receive hundreds of emails. You should have a subject line that makes them want to take the next step and read the email.

## **Tone**

Your email will convey a tone of voice, but it will come through only in the actual words that you write. Choose language that is welcoming, for instance, “Thanks for your business” or “We appreciate your business.” Remember that humor sometimes is misinterpreted in writing, so if you want to use humor, do it carefully. Emails can also seem either more formal or more informal than you intended. Read your message aloud in a monotone to determine if you are coming across as you had hoped.

## **Responding to email**

Just as it is important to greet your customer promptly in person, you must do the same with email. Respond to a customer’s email as soon as possible. Waiting even 24 hours can make a customer feel slighted. Sometimes when a customer asks you a question, you may need time to answer the query appropriately. You should still write back immediately to say that you will provide the information as soon as you can. It’s helpful to give a definite time for your response.

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To make it easy for your customer to contact you, your signature should include:

Your name

Your business name

Your address

Your phone number

Your website

For some businesses, it's a good idea to create templates for emails. Although templates can and should be personalized, using them can save time and ensure the right tone.

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

GREETING  
*by* WEBSITE

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL



## *Chapter 21*

# Welcoming Websites

OFTEN A CUSTOMER'S FIRST MEETING with your business is on the Web. Because of that, you need to greet and welcome your customer through your website. Obviously the nature of a greeting that is viewed on a computer screen is different from any other type. But you still need certain elements to make your customers feel valued.

Remember, it is even easier for your customer to “walk out” of your website and go to your competitor's website than it was for Nick (in the opening story) to walk out of that department store in the mall. I believe that, first and foremost, customers want their experience to be easy. So, what does that mean for your website?

### **Get rid of Flash openings**

I recommend doing away with Flash openings. Imagine forcing customers walking into your business to watch a 30-second video before they're allowed to enter. If you were the customer, what would you do?

Same thing with a website. Make it easy and welcoming. Of course, if Flash animation is your business, then such an opening is appropriate. However, if you're really really attached to your Flash opening, and it would pain you to give it up, I suggest you provide your customers with an option for viewing it. Alternatively, make certain that the link to skip the opening (which most of your customers will do) is obvious.

### **Make it easy to contact you**

Be certain that your contact information is easy to find. I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have had to click and scroll through a website in order to simply locate the phone number. Your contact info should not be hidden as if it were the prize at the end of a treasure hunt. A hard-to-find phone number gives the strong impression that you really do not want to talk to your customers. Display it at the bottom of every page and/or have an obvious Contact Us link.

### **Make it easy to read**

In an article at [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com), Jakob Nielsen, Ph.D. (of Nielsen Norman Group, [www.nngroup.com](http://www.nngroup.com)) writes about improving website usability for lower-literacy users. Nielson recommends the following:

*“The main and most obvious advice is to simplify the text: use text aimed at a 6th grade reading level on the homepage, important category pages, and landing pages. On other pages, use text geared to an 8th grade reading level.*

*“You can also improve your site’s usability for lower-literacy users in several other ways:*

### ***Prioritize information***

*“Place the main point at the very top of the page, where even those people who typically stop reading after a few lines will see it.*

*“Place any other important information ‘above the fold,’ to minimize the risk of users losing their place after scrolling. This is always good practice; even the most skilled readers will leave a page if the first few paragraphs do not seem valuable. Actually, it’s even better to avoid the need to scroll altogether (teenagers, especially, hate to scroll)—unless eliminating it requires content to be chopped into unnaturally short sections, which can be confusing.*

*“Avoid text that moves or changes, such as animations and fly-out menus. Static text is easier to read. This guideline also helps international users (who might need to look up words in a dictionary) and users with motor-skill impairments (who have difficulty catching things that move).*

### ***Streamline the page design***

*“Place important content in a single main column, so users don’t have to scan the page and pick out design elements in a two-dimensional layout. This guideline also helps low-vision users as well as users of handheld devices (such as smartphones), which narrow the field of view.*

*“Simplify navigation by placing the main choices in a linear menu. This helps users clearly understand the next place to go without requiring them to scan the page for options.*

### ***Optimize your search engine***

*“Make your search engine tolerant of misspellings (which also aids seniors, who are particularly prone to making typos). Ideally, a user’s first search hit should answer the query, and all hits should provide short, easy-to-read summaries.”*

### **Make your words welcoming**

Use language that shows your customers you care about them, straight forward and without jargon.

You may also choose to have your website translated into other languages so that all your customers will be able to read your material.

MANAGING  
*your* EMPLOYEES'  
GREETINGS

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

*Chapter 22*

# Managing Your Employees' Greetings

IF YOU WANT TO BE CERTAIN that your employees are greeting your customers in an appropriate manner, you need to take a leadership role. As a manager or owner of a business, you set the standard. If you don't believe that greeting your customers appropriately is essential for the well-being of your organization, it's unlikely that your employees will.

The following methods will help you create a workplace where employees greet customers in a manner that makes them feel welcome.

## **What business are you in?**

Your first step in this process is to ask yourself a seemingly simple question whose answer makes all the difference in customer relations: What business are you in?

Now, I'm aware that this sounds like a silly question. Naturally, you know the type of work you're engaged in. But in posing this

question, I'm really asking you to approach your business from a perspective that's probably different from any you have previously considered. The reason is that, in the 20 years that I have been examining the business world, I have found that those organizations whose answer to this question is "I'm in the customer service business"—no matter what their actual line of work—invariably do what it takes to make their customers feel welcome.

Let me give you an example. We all know that banks keep bankers' hours. But one of my local banks opens its doors early whenever customers are waiting outside. These people are not in the banking business. They are in the customer service business.

Let me tell you about an experience I had. A good friend was having a birthday, and I was asked to make a cake for her celebration. It was a very busy period for me, and I was feeling under a great deal of pressure. I knew I didn't have the luxury of time to make a whole cake from scratch. So, I walked into the bakery of my local grocery store and stared at the cakes in the display case. They were all beautiful and perfect, and I stood there, trying to figure out how I might pass one off as my own. The counterperson greeted me warmly, asking how she could help. I said jokingly, "Well, what would really help is if you could just sell me two cake layers." She answered, "Let me go back and ask." I laughed and said, "No, I was just joking. This is a



bakery. You can't just sell the cake layers." She said, "I'll check." A minute later she returned and asked, "What flavor? What size?" Now, I would say that this bakery was not actually in the bakery business. If they were, they would not sell anything but those beautiful and perfect cakes. Instead, these people were in the customer service business. Clearly, the employee understood that. When she stepped up to greet me and asked how she could help, she meant it. Her focus was on my needs.

### **Create a customer service statement**

Let me say right off that I think many mission statements are meaningless drivel. They tend to be words on paper, with nothing to stand behind them. Because of that, the term 'mission statement' has been given such a bad rap that should you decide you want to write such a statement for your business, you probably ought to call it something else. Otherwise, the term alone can distract people from the importance of what you're trying to accomplish.

So, let's say we're going to refer to this business credo as a customer service statement. For that to be effective, you must craft a statement that is truly customer focused. If you are then willing to stand behind your words with energy, money, and resources, that statement can be a rallying point for your employees.

For your statement to be effective, it must incorporate the words—or some variation of them—"We are in the customer

service business.” Another thing I don’t believe is that you should post this statement where your customers can read them, because they shouldn’t have to. You want your employees to embody the words. Your customers should experience your statement so fully that, if asked, they could define it for you.

### **Value your employees**

There is probably no more important element in managing your employees’ greetings than to value your employees and, moreover, to let them know that you do. Many studies have proven that there is a direct correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

In a white paper for Guidestar (Guidestarco.com), Caterina C. Bulgarella, Ph.D. wrote, “What should organizations do to ensure high job satisfaction among their employees? As found in the practices of Fortune 100 companies, employee satisfaction is the result of a holistic approach that involves strategic steps such as:

1. Identify root causes of dissatisfaction among employees.
2. Conduct benchmark studies of best practices in selected other companies.
3. Develop employee satisfaction measurement systems that can be used corporate-wide and worldwide.
4. Monitor employee satisfaction on a regular basis.
5. View employees as the primary source of competitive advantage.

6. Show concern for total employee well-being.
7. Develop meaningful employee involvement and effective communication channels.
8. Introduce managerial accountability for people management. Many employees provide exceptional customer service in spite of the circumstances that they work under. I have seen beleaguered flight attendants smile and help people out however they can. When I see someone in this position, I try to imagine how much more they could do if their employers valued them and showed it to them on a regular basis.”

## **Modeling**

One of the best ways to get employees to greet your customers properly is to model the behavior you are hoping for. That means you need to greet your customers—and your employees—the same way that you want your employees to greet your customers. Your greeting needs to be welcoming, and it needs to be consistent. Acknowledging your employees as you pass them in the hall truly helps them feel a valuable part of your business, and they will respond to that treatment by passing the feeling of being valued along to your customers.

## **Create greeting policies and procedures**

Here I go again with another list of business practices that I don't believe in. I am not a big fan of policies and procedures that stress the benefit to the company. However, creating policies and

procedures that benefit your customers is a good idea. And a greeting policy is an excellent example of these. The following policies (some mentioned previously) can educate and reinforce best greeting practices. It may be good to have them written out as a reminder to your employees.

- Five-foot rule: When you pass customers (or co-workers) and are within five feet of them, make sure you warmly greet them with a hello.
- Always acknowledge customers when they enter your business. Do this with a verbal greeting or possibly a nonverbal one if you are with another customer.
- If you are not helping another customer, stop what you are doing—and especially end conversations with co-workers—when you are near customers.
- Greet, but do not hover. No one likes to feel stalked.
- Greet, offer help, and then retreat if the customer doesn't require your assistance.
- Walk your customers to where they are going. Do not just point and say, "It's over there."

## **Scripts and templates**

Spontaneous greetings are always best, but you should understand that these days, with our hectic lifestyles and abbreviated means of communication, many people are simply not familiar with what were once accepted conventions of greeting people. If presented effectively, a script might benefit your employees. This is especially true for businesses that ask employees to

multitask. Going from solo tasks to socializing with customers calls for a major shift in attitude.

Even something as simple as a phone script that says, “Good morning, business name, your name, how may I help you?” placed where employees can easily see it, will reinforce the way that you want your phones to be answered. It’s also a good idea to check every so often to ensure that all calls are actually answered this way.

If your employees must deal with customers through the written word—whether it’s email, regular mail, instructions, scheduled appointments, etc.—help them avoid bad practices by creating templates for these basic texts.

An example of what can happen if you don’t: My husband had a procedure performed by a physician. When it came time to give directions for taking the required medications, the receptionist actually gave my husband a piece of paper with the wrong information. Had the doctor created a simple template for instructions, this potentially catastrophic error would probably have been avoided.

## **Training**

It is not sufficient merely to create greeting policies and procedures. You need to provide training for your employees. All new hires should be made aware of your policies and procedures.

## *The GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL*

I believe that everyone needs to receive training in how to greet properly.

Now, training does not mean sitting your people in front of a PowerPoint display of your new policies. That will not affect their behavior. What it does mean is engaging them actively in learning both the importance and the methods of appropriate greetings. Consider role playing to help your employees become more comfortable with greeting customers. Yes, I know, everyone hates to role play. It tends to be embarrassing and can devolve into something silly. To avoid this, when I incorporate role playing into my classes, I break people up into teams of three. One person plays the customer, one person plays the employee, and one person audits the interaction. After the group plays out the situation, I ask all three people to comment on how they felt the exchange went. Then I have them switch roles. This allows people to “try on” new behavior without the embarrassment of being in front of the whole class.

You may also want to give your employees a chance to discuss and create their own behaviors that embody your customer service statement.

Have follow up training and discussions to see if there are any roadblocks to their new greeting behavior. Open communication between you and your employees will ensure that you’re all working together to make your customers feel welcome.

## **Rewards and recognition**

When your employees exhibit the kind of behavior that you want to encourage, they should be recognized and rewarded. Studies have shown us that the more you acknowledge good behavior, the more likely your employees are to repeat it. Often it is easy to ignore the good and only focus on the bad. That's a mistake that has consequences for your business.

When someone sends a letter or note complimenting a staff member on how they were greeted (or anything else), be sure to share the good news with at least that employee.

One of my clients created a "Most Wanted" board where such positive comments are posted for all the staff to see. It can also be effective to place positive feedback boards where your customers can read them.

When you consider rewarding your employees for their good greetings, you might cater lunch for everyone in the department to say thanks for a job well done. It's not necessary, though, to use a one-size-fits-all approach. Find the best reward for that individual person. As long as the rewards are comparable, this strategy works very well. For instance, one employee might like a gift card, while another might want paid time off. The point is to let your employees know that you appreciate them and how they treat your customers. And, let them know this on a regular basis.

## **Matching your company's brand**

Not all greetings should be the same. Every business has a brand image, and your greeting needs to correspond to it. Think about it. Wouldn't you expect a Wall Street law firm to greet you differently than a rib joint in Mississippi?

If you're not sure how to determine what greeting is appropriate to your business, try this: Write down three words that you would like your customers to use to describe your business to their friends. You might come up with such words as caring, fun, sincere, dynamic, professional, efficient. Your next step is to determine what style of greeting would elicit that description from your customers.

Let's consider that Wall Street law firm. My guess is that they would want their customers to describe them as professional, knowledgeable, and efficient. So, their greeting might be, "Welcome to Hurd, Thorp and Locker. This is Andrew. How may I help you?" Whereas the rib joint might be described as down-home, friendly, and fun. So, they might greet customers with, "Hey, y'all, glad to see you. Grab a seat, I'll be right with you."



# TOP TEN TIPS *for* a GREAT GREETING

1. It is everyone's job to greet the customer.
2. Customers must be greeted, or at least acknowledged, immediately.
3. A good attitude is essential to a good greeting.
4. Make it your goal to make your customers feel welcome.
5. Greet an unhappy customer warmly with the intent to solve their problem.
6. Understand your diverse customers' needs and greet them appropriately.
7. Use appropriate eye contact.
8. Use welcoming words.
9. Make sure your tone of voice is warm and upbeat.
10. All communication, in person, on the phone, by email or through the web—needs to be welcoming.

*The* GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

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A key asset that Laurie brings to her work is her range and depth of experience. She has an international clientele, having worked on four continents and numerous countries including the UK, Panama, Japan, Mexico, Germany, Canada, Spain, Australia and Thailand, and throughout the United States. Laurie has worked with culturally diverse audiences at all corporate levels, and her clients have included Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and small family-owned businesses.

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# *Praise for* THE GREET YOUR CUSTOMER MANUAL

**MOST COMPANIES DON'T GET** that successful businesses greet their customers with a friendly "Hello!". Laurie Brown does. And she understands what every element of greeting has to do with loyal profitable customers. Buy this book today, start implementing it tomorrow, and Laurie will take you from Greet to Great.

Jeffrey Gitomer

Author of *The Little Gold Book of YES! Attitude*

**CONVERTING YOUR CUSTOMERS** into apostles starts with how your customer is greeted. Whether you greet them on the phone, in person, by email or through a website, you need to know—and use—the simple actionable tips included in Laurie Brown's "The Greet Your Customer Manual."

Dr. Tony Alessandra, author of *The NEW Art of Managing People* and *The Platinum Rule*

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Marilyn Suttle and Lori Jo Vest, co-authors of *Who's Your Gladys?*

*How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan*

**THE FIRST MOMENTS WITH A CUSTOMER** set the tone for whatever is to follow. More than a book, this is a manual that contains practical and easy-to-implement techniques about how to greet your customers. If you have any interaction at all with customers, then you must read this book — I mean manual!

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