

TOP 10

GOLDEN NUGGETS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Decrease turnover and build relationships by becoming
a customer service guru BY DAVID K. AAKER, IOM

EVERY AREA OF LIFE HAS CUSTOMERS, and the real estate management industry is no exception. Your tenants/residents, vendors and owners depend on you for solving problems, saving money and getting things done right—in addition to providing a high level of customer service.

Following are my *Top Ten Golden Nuggets* of customer service. Apply them to your business relationships and transform even the most difficult customer into a successful story.

1

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER BY NAME

Get a commitment to the conversation: Acknowledge your customer by first name in the first two sentences.

At the beginning of your phone call or when leaving a voicemail message, take a few seconds to write down the specific time and full name and/or title of the customer to make sure you have them recorded correctly. Ground the conversation by repeating your customer's name throughout the conversation or message. Believe me, your customer will notice the extra effort, and you'll be able to stay a few words and ideas ahead of the conversation at all times without worrying about forgetting valuable contact information.

2

LISTEN TWICE AS MUCH AS YOU TALK

Make a special effort to apply this tactic.

Sometimes we find ourselves talking over one another, particularly toward the end of the conversation. It's like someone having a conversation during the final words of a great movie: the impact is lost.

Making a habit of listening more than you talk is not as easy as it sounds, but it gives you the opportunity to fully understand what the customer is requesting—particularly when these requests aren't explicitly stated. Beyond demonstrating respect to the person you are speaking with, making an effort to listen reduces the chance of misunderstandings.

3

ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH

You have less than ten seconds—the time it takes to drive by a new billboard—to make an impression on your customer.

In the real estate management world, it's not only your expertise that matters—it's the way you communicate your expertise. The brief, seconds-long window of your first impression can make or break business decisions for years to come. Truth can be interpreted in a split second, and will determine if your relationships are established with trust and confidence. Always tell the truth, and you will never forget what you said.

4

NEVER ARGUE WITH A CUSTOMER

There is no future in arguing.

This little piece of advice has rescued me many times during my 20 years as a CEO: "When one won't, two can't argue."

A large portion of your day is spent in negotiations—not just with finances, tenant improvements or maintenance tasks, but with relationships. We send and receive communication through the following three delivery methods: 1) 7 percent by the tone of our voice; and 2) 38 percent by the words we speak; and 3) 55 percent by nonverbal communication, such as mannerisms and body language. Have you considered the nonverbal signals you may be sending to your customers?

5

UNDER-PROMISE, OVER-PERFORM

When is the last time someone has exceeded your expectations? Wasn't it surprising?

A couple of years ago, I entered a line for a ride at Disneyland. The sign said, "Waiting time from this point is 25 minutes," but I ended up reaching the entrance to the ride within fifteen minutes. I noticed, and I was impressed.

Finding small ways to under-promise and over-perform goes a long way in ensuring your customer is completely satisfied.

**A CUSTOMER WHO COMPLAINS
ACTUALLY OFFERS YOU THE
OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE UP FOR
HIS/HER DISSATISFACTION.**

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN:

- 7% BY THE WORDS WE SPEAK
 → 38% BY THE TONE OF OUR VOICE
 → 55% BODY LANGUAGE

6 → FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP

Fact: In your last meeting, phone call or personal conversation, the other person only heard 7 percent of what you said.

The power of a simple follow-up is astounding. It costs approximately five times more to acquire a new client, customer or tenant, than to keep those you currently have.

If a potential new tenant is shopping for a new location and the conversation leaves a few unanswered questions, make an effort to find answers and follow up in a timely manner. Remember, no one wants your new tenant more than your competition. Take inventory of the last three conversations: Did you deliver what they requested? Did they receive your e-mail or FedEx in a timely manner? Never regret taking the time to follow up, it keeps the doors of communication open, builds a better commitment to your customers and reduces turnover.

7 → BE THANKFUL FOR CUSTOMERS WHO COMPLAIN

A complaining customer provides an opportunity to serve.

Consider that most unsatisfied customers typically move on—perhaps to your competition—when unsatisfied. A customer who complains actually offers you the opportunity to make up for his/her dissatisfaction; take the chance to turn an unhappy customer into a loyal customer. Personally and professionally provide solutions to complaints—it's worth the investment.

8 → SHOW ENTHUSIASM

"Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will travel for miles to watch you burn." —John Wesley

It is not a felony to have fun: Sincere enthusiasm is one of the strongest tools you can use to achieve business success.

Enthusiasm is such a great business builder; use it often, use it with sincerity and use it any time you communicate. What can you say in your next conversation that your customer will remember one year from now?

9 → BE THANKFUL FOR EACH AND EVERY CUSTOMER

Never underestimate the power of gratitude: Don't assume your customers know that you appreciate and value them.

Each time you have the opportunity to share a sincere thank you with someone who is in your sphere of influence, don't hesitate to do so. It is easy to take long-term customers for granted and assume they will remain loyal simply because they have been with you for several years. Take the opportunity to sincerely thank those who have made you a success—you know who they are. Simply telling someone that you appreciate and value your business relationship can go a long way. When was the last time someone told you that?

10 → FOLLOW THE GOLDEN RULE

Serve others as you expect to be served.

By nature, we are judgmental in several areas of our lives. The standards we set in our own lives are often the standards others have set, too. Each day, you have the opportunity to set the benchmark—and even raise the bar—with the services you provide to customers.

Customer service is not a "big thing," it is a conglomeration of the many "little things" that combine to make a big difference. I invite you to put your fingerprint on these "Golden Nuggets" and witness how the relationships in your life grow and flourish.



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