

## **Customer Service: Seeing what your customers see**

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No doubt that customer service is the life line for any business. Without it your business will never stop chasing customers in order to stay afloat. We have all experience horrific customer service situations at some point in our life. A lousy server at a restaurant or a rude clerk at a store can make us want to go elsewhere to have our needs met in the future. We know good service when we see it but have you ever wondered how certain business seem to always have employees that get it right? How does this happen and what can we do to be such a business?

Here are some fundamentals that must be in place if you want your company to deliver great service every time:

- 1. Know what it is that you want to deliver.** Great customer service starts by having a vision. You have to see what it is that you want to accomplish. Try this exercise. Imagine one of your customers having a conversation with a friend and the conversation is about you, your team and your business. Your customer is asked about their experience and as they are about to answer you suddenly have the power to control their thoughts and words. If you had such power what would you have them say about you, your team and your business? Maybe you would have them say, "I love living at my apartment community because the staff is so friendly. They know me by name and talk to me like I am important to them. When I need something they get to it right away and it is always done right the first time." This would be a great testimonial for your business. The big question is how do you make this vision a reality? Once you decide on what your vision is for your customers it immediately leads us to our second point:
- 2. What do you have to do to make your vision a reality?** You start developing the delivery of your vision by breaking it down into points of action. In my example above I touched on the following items: Friendly staff, they know my name, I feel important, prompt response, quality workmanship. The next thing we must do is put together an action plan for delivering these items. We must ensure that we hire friendly people. We must put together a plan for learning the names of all of our residents. We must make sure that we have systems in place that allow us to respond quickly to the needs of our residents and we must make sure that we are all properly trained on all aspects of our business. One important point to consider is that you must gain the commitment of every team member in order for this to work. If one person fails to see this as an important part of their job description you will fail to deliver this to every customer. This is easier said than done, which leads me to my next point:

- 3. You must recognize that what you do and how you do it affects the other members on your team.** If we develop tunnel vision we don't always see how our carelessness affects our coworker's ability to deliver our vision. We must exercise our peripheral vision. An example is in taking work orders. If a leasing agent writes a work order that is incorrect or missing vital information it hinders our maintenance staff from being able to deliver prompt and accurate service to our residents. If I receive a work order that is missing important information I lose valuable time in my day because I spend too much time trying to figure out just what it is that I should be doing. A classic example is a work order that says, "Outlet not working in the apartment." There are more than 20 outlets in the apartment so I have to waste time going from room to room testing every outlet until I find the one that isn't working. The result is that at the end of the day there might be work orders that come in that I can't get to until tomorrow because of the time I lost on the outlet work order. These residents don't feel like we deliver prompt service which means that we aren't delivering on our vision. The important point to remember here is that what I do affects my team members so I need to be careful and make sure that I execute on every job. Execution means doing what should be done, the way it should be done, when it should be done. This has to be something that we deliver time and time again. We can't pick and choose when we deliver our vision. If we fail to deliver it just once that person will tell others just how poor your customer service is. This leads me to my final point:
- 4. I want every customer to enjoy doing business with me.** Not everyone should be your customer. You need to be able to identify just who you want as a customer. Once someone is identified as your desired customer you should make sure that everyone one receives the same high level of customer service. Sometimes you will have a customer that isn't very friendly to you or to your staff. If that person is a good paying customer and not creating problems for other good customers than it shouldn't matter to you or your staff that this person isn't friendly. Your mantra should be, "Every customer will enjoy being my customer." It shouldn't matter how friendly they are or how they respond to your vision. It should be based on the fact that they met the requirements you set in order to become your customer. This means that you don't have any inferior customers. You don't have any "favorite" customers. You only have customers. If someone fails to meet your standards like they are not paying their rent or invoices then you stop doing business with them but as long as they are your customer you do everything you can to deliver your vision.

Customer service isn't always easy. Sometimes we will be tested by our coworkers, customers and even our friends and families but once we walk through the doors of our place of business we need to realize that we are being watched by everyone and we need to carefully choose our attitudes. Since you get to choose your attitude towards your work, your employer and your customers make sure you are picking one that you can be proud of and one that supports your customer service vision.

About the author: Bill Nye, Ph.D. is the owner of Bill Nye Training. He is a nationally recognized speaker and trainer in the areas of team building and customer service. His clients include The United States Air Force, Clear Channel Radio, SFX Entertainment and The National Apartment Association. Bill is coming to Austin on January 30<sup>th</sup> to deliver a seminar on customer service to the Austin Apartment Association. For information on Bill you can go to his website at [www.BillNyeTraining.com](http://www.BillNyeTraining.com)

