

★ BECOMING A CUSTOMER SERVICE STAR ★



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REPORT PREPARED FOR: Sample Report
REPORT DATE:

Customer service has become increasingly important in recent years as organizations have realized that the most important factor in their success is *how they treat their customers*.

This Inventory looks at your *personal* values and natural strengths toward customer service. You will identify areas in which you have strong customer service values and those on which you may wish to focus additional attention. By examining your values, you may be able to make a greater total contribution to the satisfaction of your customers.

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Introduction to Becoming a Customer Service Star

Customer service is a subject that receives a great deal of attention as organizations realize that their success depends on having satisfied customers. Despite the emphasis on customer service, however, the exact nature of that service is not always well-defined. Typically, each individual has a different preconceived notion of what constitutes good customer service. Some people consider good service to be doing what is stated in the company mission statement or policy manual. Others believe that good customer service is a process of solving customers' problems. Still others see customer service as nothing more than a greeting and a smile.

Five categories of excellent customer service have been identified based on current theories of customer service, as well as on the author's personal experience in consulting with customer service personnel. These categories correspond to the Five Dimensions of Becoming a Customer Service Star.

Five Dimensions of Becoming a Customer Service Star



Feel Positively Toward Customers

Excellent customer service begins with a positive attitude toward customers. Individuals who enjoy customer interaction demonstrate it with enthusiasm, eye contact, positive voice inflection and the desire to build a friendly rapport.



Encourage Customer Feedback

In order to provide excellent service to customers, you must know what your customers need and want. Encouraging customers to provide you with both positive and negative feedback is crucial to fulfilling their needs.



Respond to Customer Problems

Responding to problems is one of the fastest ways to capture customer loyalty. The standard of service is at risk when the response to a problem is delayed, passed to several people or ignored.



Develop Repeat Relationships

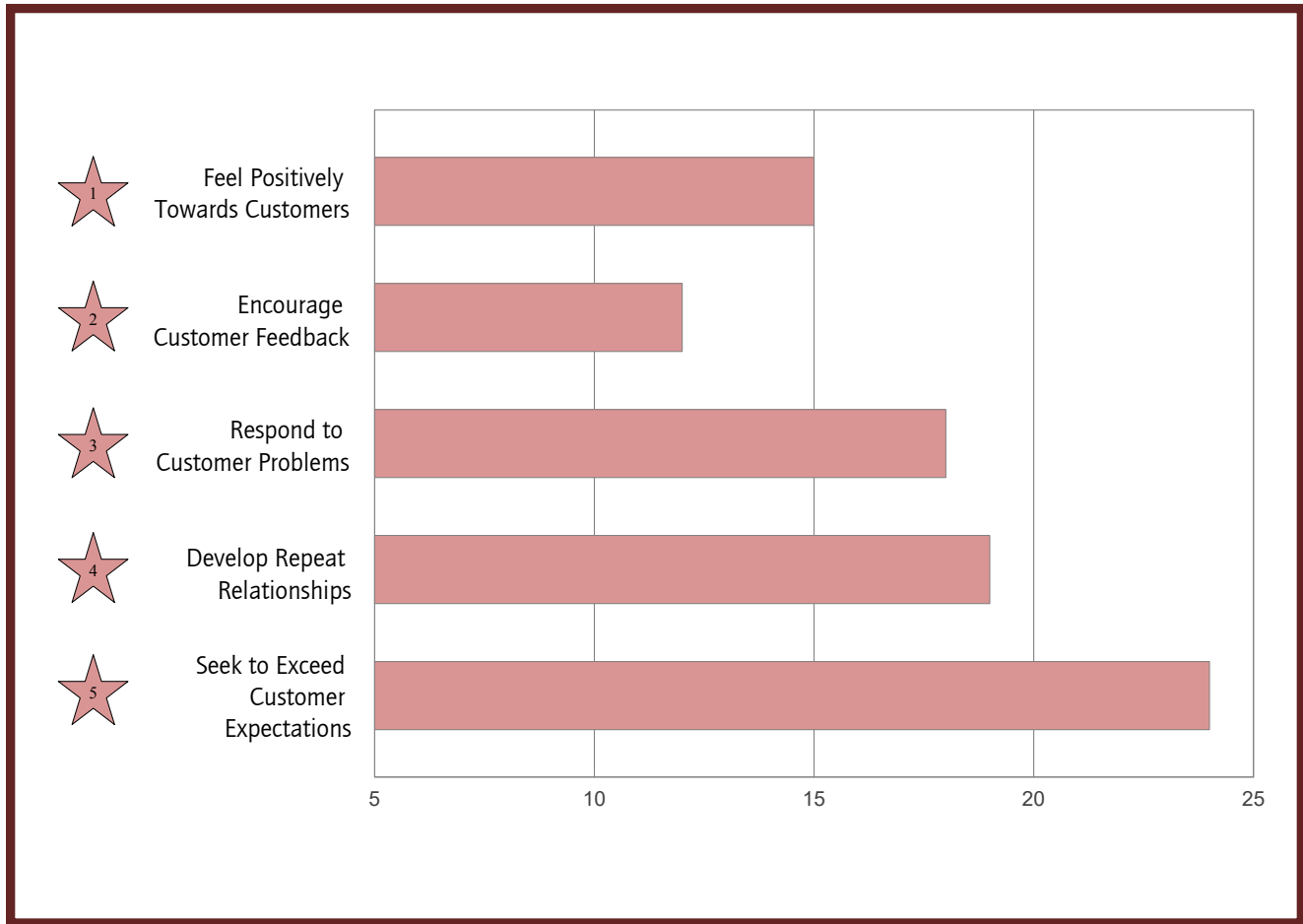
Long-term relationships pay the largest dividends because the value of a customer increases over time. In order to develop repeat relationships, individuals should take positive actions by treating every situation with an understanding of the lifetime value of a customer. Lifetime value is the potential annual value of a customer multiplied by the number of years you hope to retain them as a customer.



Seek to Exceed Customer Expectations

The greatest opportunity to satisfy and retain customers is to find ways to exceed their expectations. Doing more than a customer expects makes that customer's experience a memorable one, which can spark future business.

Your Customer Service Star Profile



Review your scores shown above. The highest score is your primary customer service skill. The second highest score is your secondary customer service skill. A score of 15 or lower on a dimension suggests that you may need to develop your understanding and skills in this area.

The following pages provide an individual explanation of each dimension, including your score and the average score from a sample of over 600 respondents.

A selection of questions about each dimension has been included for your further development.



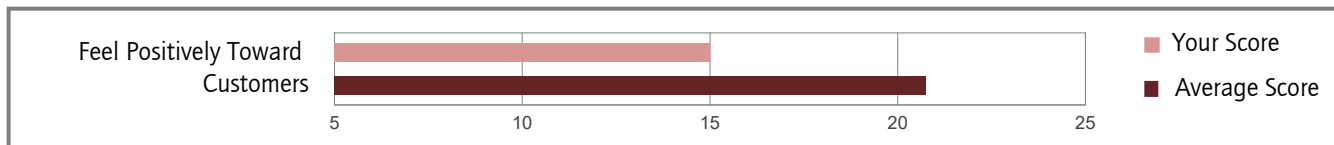
Feel Positively Toward Customers

A positive attitude toward customers is the first step to excellent service. Individuals who have a positive attitude enjoy serving customers and find it easy to approach and develop a rapport with them. Customer contact and involvement must be enjoyed, demonstrated, and emulated at all levels, just as you would treat welcome guests in your home.

Smiling is an easy skill that has great impact on customer service. When you smile, you create a positive mood for yourself and tend to relax. It is also contagious. When your customers are greeted with a smile and eye contact, they relax, find you more approachable, and most often, will smile right back. Even on the phone, smiling dramatically improves your tone of voice and the quality of service you provide your customers.

Asking a friend, co-worker, or boss to evaluate your vocal quality or recording your own voice is useful in finding out how you sound to your customers. You might be surprised by what they are hearing.

Your score on this dimension: 15



Your score suggests that you do not enjoy interacting with customers as part of your responsibilities. Adopting some of the suggestions below may help to make your experience easier, maybe even fun.

Elements of this dimension that are essential for excellent customer service:

- ☆ Acknowledge your customers with eye contact (for face-to-face customers) and a positive greeting.
- ☆ Smile when you acknowledge people.
- ☆ Stop other tasks and focus on your customer's needs.
- ☆ Actively listen to what the customer is saying.
- ☆ Summarize the customer's request to assure you have heard him/her correctly.

	Completely true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	A little true	Not true
1. I feel good interacting with customers on a daily basis.	★				
6. Having to serve people is frustrating.			★		
11. I do not mind being interrupted to talk to customers.				★	
16. Customers should be treated like guests.					★
21. The most enjoyable part of my job is serving customers.		★			

To develop your skills, consider the following questions:

1. What greetings might you use to treat a customer like a welcomed guest?

2. What are some subjects you might use as conversation starters?

3. How do you express appreciation to customers for the opportunity to be of service?

4. What would be appropriate behavior for establishing rapport with a customer?

5. What phrases are important to avoid in your line of work?



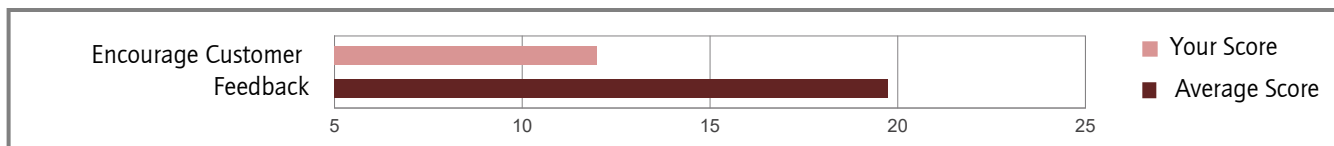
Encourage Customer Feedback

Providing outstanding service to customers is impossible if you don't know their wants and needs. The best sources of information about customers' needs are your customers themselves. Both positive and negative feedback are necessary. Organizations and customer service personnel need to know not only what customers find unsatisfactory, but also what they find pleasing.

Encouraging customers to provide feedback may also make them feel that you care about their input. In addition, when customers' needs are being met, your job will be more enjoyable and satisfying. Feedback can take many forms such as asking customers how their experience was after they were served, customer comment cards, toll-free numbers, and customer focus groups.

With telephone customers, it is important to validate your good listening skills by summarizing the customer's problem or request. Allow them to then clarify any misunderstandings or confirm that you understand the issue at hand. This builds confidence and allows you to take the correct action.

Your score on this dimension: 12



Your score suggests that you could do more to encourage customer feedback. The only person who really knows what the customer is thinking is the customer. Simply asking how their experience was is a great way to start.

Elements of this dimension that are essential for excellent customer service:

- ☆ Ask if your customer is satisfied with your level of service.
- ☆ Present your customer with a comment card.
- ☆ Ask for suggestions on improving your service.
- ☆ Let them know you look forward to serving them in the future.
- ☆ Inquire how you can keep them as a happy customer.

	Completely true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	A little true	Not true
2. I provide my name to customers who have comments.	★				
7. I encourage people to give me both positive and negative feedback.					★
12. I ask customers for suggestions on how I can improve my service.					★
17. I do not encourage customers to evaluate my service.				★	
22. I invite customers to fill out comment cards or share their thoughts.					★

To develop your skills, consider the following questions:

1. How can you determine if the service you provide a customer is satisfactory?

2. What are some creative ways that you can use comment cards?

3. In what ways can you ensure that you are approachable?

4. At what point is it best to talk to customers about their expectations?

5. Why is it important for customers to suggest improvements to your service?



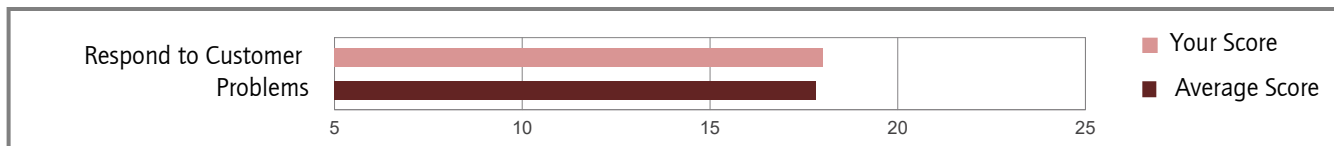
Respond to Customer Problems

Reacting quickly and responsively to customer problems is an essential part of customer service. Customer problems can serve as an opportunity to improve your level of service. Excellent service involves finding any means possible to solve problems to the customer's satisfaction. This may include eliminating roadblocks that get in the way of taking care of customers, determining what can and cannot be done to resolve problems, and following up to make sure problems are adequately resolved. Whenever possible, a written response is considerably more powerful than a verbal response in ensuring customer loyalty.

Most people are uncomfortable when they come in or call with a complaint. You have the opportunity to set a pleasant tone to the conversation by simply indicating your pleasure in address the problem. Make sure that you confirm that the customer understands any actions you plan to take on his or her behalf. If solving a problem, ask the customer if the proposed solution will meet his or her needs. Ask questions like, "How appropriate does this sound?" or "What if we were able to do this?"

It is important to not allow your emotions to become part of the problem. Be sensitive without becoming emotionally involved. Remind yourself, the customer is not angry with you, they are upset with the situation and you can resolve it.

Your score on this dimension: 18



Your score indicates that you attempt to solve problems, but may not do so immediately. A slow response can lead to even more dissatisfaction. A problem or complaint should be approached as an opportunity to quickly restore confidence with a disappointed customer.

Elements of this dimension that are essential for excellent customer service:

- ☆ Ask your customers what would satisfy them in resolving the problem.
- ☆ Determine how you can keep the customer for future business.
- ☆ Identify areas of resolving problems where you can assume greater empowerment.
- ☆ Understand any obstacles that get in the way of providing satisfactory service.
- ☆ Always let your customers know what you can do to solve a problem.

	Completely true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	A little true	Not true
3. I rectify problems by asking customers what will satisfy them.					★
8. I avoid having customers identify problems to me.					★
13. I follow up in writing to customers with problems.		★			
18. I take immediate action to correct problems.	★				
23. I use customer complaints as an opportunity to restore customer confidence.			★		

To develop your skills, consider the following questions:

1. How can you resolve problems without a customer having to ask you to do so?

2. What can you do to resolve customer problems? What actions are you unable to take?

3. What roadblocks get in the way of taking immediate action on a customer’s problem?

4. How can you encourage an unhappy customer to return?

5. What are some creative ways to follow up on a problem?

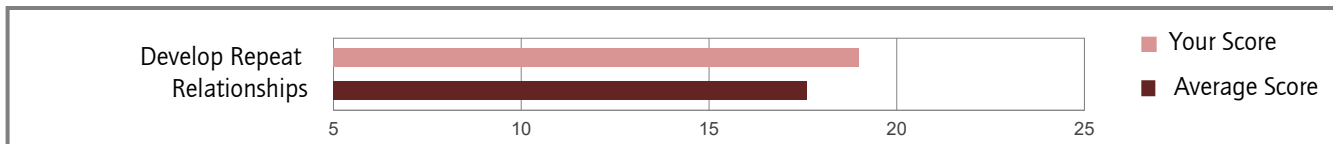


Develop Repeat Relationships

Developing long-term relationships with customers has many benefits. Repeat customers are more valuable than new customers because the cost of recruiting new customers exceeds the cost of retaining a steady customer. In addition, repeat customers can provide valuable feedback on service. Several actions develop repeat relationships, including remembering customers' names and previous purchases or favorite items; using notes and phone calls to follow up on a sale; and inviting customers back for future business.

Your initial job is to put your customers at ease and establish trust. With telephone customers, introduce yourself and give an honest indication of the purpose of the call. Find other ways to personalize calls, including asking customers about their previous purchases. Don't forget to close the call by thanking them for their business and encouraging them to return in the future.

Your score on this dimension: 19



Your score suggests that repeat customers are not your top priority. You may be focusing more on acquiring new customers, but keep in mind that loyal customers not only come back again and again, but they also tell others about your great customer service, resulting in new business.

Elements of this dimension that are essential for excellent customer service:

- ☆ Keep records of the names of your customers. Provide them with your name by giving them your business card or writing your name on their receipt.
- ☆ Remember your customers' previous experiences and inquire about their satisfaction.
- ☆ Inquire about the personal interests and experiences of your customers.
- ☆ Make decisions that keep the customer for a lifetime.
- ☆ Value the long-term relationship over the immediate transaction.

	Completely true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	A little true	Not true
4. I keep records of my better customers.	★				
9. I follow up by inviting customers to return or call again.		★			
14. I have difficulty remembering customers by name.					★
19. Customers ask for me personally to take care of them.		★			
24. Repeat customers get more of my attention than new customers.					★

To develop your skills, consider the following questions:

1. What can you do to encourage customers to return?

2. How can you develop greater loyalty from your customers?

3. How can you stay in touch with your customers?

4. What special services do you provide for repeat customers?

5. What techniques might you use to help you remember customers' names?

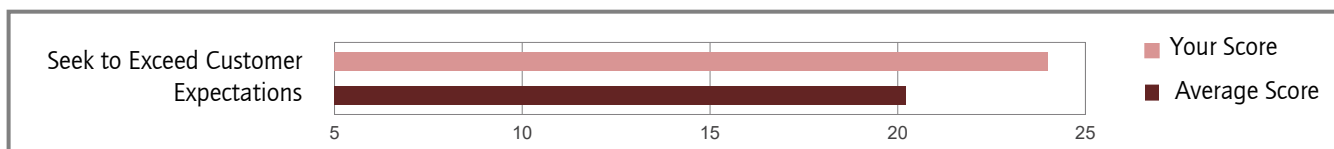


Seek to Exceed Customer Expectations

Customers have expectations about the service they will receive from you. When you make the extra effort to exceed those expectations, your customers will remember the experience. Their good feelings will not only cause them to come back in the future but may also generate additional business as they share their positive experience with others.

Exceeding expectations involves looking for special ways to make customer service memorable and ensure that customers will return. This often means that you go the extra mile when serving others, look for ways to add value to the customer's experience and remember the individual after they leave you.

Your score on this dimension: 24



Your score indicates that you look for ways to do more than the customer expects in hopes of building a permanent relationship. People often seek you out because of the quality of your previous customer service.

Elements of this dimension that are essential for excellent customer service:

- ☆ Do more than your customer expects.
- ☆ Acknowledge the customer with follow-up notes or calls.
- ☆ Ask your customers for referrals.
- ☆ Ask how you can exceed their expectations.
- ☆ Have fun with your customers and differentiate your service from that of others.

	Completely true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	A little true	Not true
5. Customers compliment me for doing more than they request.		★			
10. Customers tell me I do more to resolve problems than they expect.	★				
15. I make each customer feel as if he/she is my most important customer.	★				
20. My definition of excellent service is to adequately meet customers' expectations.					★
25. I find ways to add value to a customer's experience.	★				

To develop your skills, consider the following questions:

1. What opportunities are there for you to do more than customers expect?

2. When is it possible to follow up with a note or phone call?

3. What special touches will make your service memorable?

4. How can you remember personal information about your customers?

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Published by HRDQ
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Web: www.HRDQ.com

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ISBN: 978-1-58854-579-4
Publisher: Martin Delahoussaye
Editorial Development: Charyl Leister
Hosting and Technology Services: TruScore www.truscore.com

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