Introducing the Customer Experience Summer Mini-series

COVID-19 is changing the way many companies do business; in fact, it's changing the world. The experience we provide and the relationships we build with our customers are more important now than ever. As everyone continues to adjust to "the new normal," customers are looking to build relationships with organizations who they can trust and believe in.

This month, we're launching a customer experience mini-series. Each week we'll explore a best practice in providing extraordinary service, along with some actionable things you can do to consistently incorporate it into your daily work. We'll also be providing a link to a video that helps illustrate just how important these behaviors are. We've selected videos that are meant to be amusing but also address serious customer service issues – they are chosen from movies, tv shows, and even some parodies.

For this week, here are four quick things you can incorporate into your day to stay positive and focused. To live our service vision of extraordinary service, every time, it's important that we begin from a place of positivity.

- **Don't forget self-care:** These are stressful and uncertain times. Make sure you are investing time and energy in yourself. It's easier to help others when we have helped ourselves.

- **Take a deep breath:** Feeling stressed? On edge because of a mad customer? Take a deep breath to calm down. You can also practice **mindful breathing** to stay focused, centered and calm.

- **Practice gratitude:** Take a moment to think of three things you are grateful for. Remembering the positive things in life can help put daily challenges into perspective.

- **Stand up:** Sitting in your chair all day can be bad for your mental and physical health. Find time to get up and stretch your muscles. **Here** are some helpful stretches.

  Check **this** out for some of the best worst customer service scenes ever.

Listening effectively

Have you ever had the feeling mid conversation that there were two different conversations going on? Like the other person was so intent on telling you something that they didn't bother listening to you? Sheldon from The Big Bang Theory is the master of that sort of thing.

Listening effectively is one of the most essential parts of extraordinary service. Unless we truly understand what the customer is going through, we can't effectively solve their problems. It's easy to focus on what WE want to tell them, instead of really taking the time to listen fully. Here are three things to keep in mind as you hone your listening skills.

Here are a few tips and tricks you can use to show your customer their time is important:

1. **Stay in the moment:** When a customer starts telling you their issue, it's easy to let our mind start working out the solution while they are talking. If a customer is frustrated, it can be easy to start planning what you will say when it's "your turn" while they are venting. Instead, try to stay in the moment with the customer. Invest your time in

listening to them and you'll be better equipped to assist them.

2. **Hear what isn't being said:** Customers often contact us when they need our help, but it's easy to forget that they don't always know exactly what they need. Without the same level of experience and expertise, they may not be asking the right questions. Use your knowledge to pick up what the customer needs even if they aren't communicating it clearly.

3. **Acknowledge the emotional:** Next week we'll be talking more about empathy, but it applies to listening as well. If we only address the rational or literal issue a customer is facing, it can mean that their concerns go unheard. Be sure to address and acknowledge the customer's unique experience and emotional investment in their situation – this helps show that we're listening not just to the words but to them as a person.

Empathy

"Sorry, not sorry."

We've all heard this before. Sometimes it's funny, sometimes it's snappy, and sometimes people leave off the "not sorry" part, but you know they are thinking it. Empathy is more than just saying, "I'm sorry." It's about acknowledging the emotional impact of a customer's situation and letting them know that you are invested in them and the solution.

Often, we feel like providing extraordinary service is just solving the problem, or maybe just putting on a happy face so we don't make things worse. Some issues don't have an easy solution, and sometimes a peppy attitude can do more harm than good. **This scene** from *Inside Out* illustrates how empathy can be useful in helping customers.

Here are a few key things to keep in mind as you look to provide empathy to your customers:

- **Empathy is a financial imperative.** Study after study shows that customers make buying decisions based on how they feel more often than any other factor. How we feel is an integral part of what we buy. (For instance, this Nike commercial has over **5 million** views.) If we ignore the emotional state of customers, we reduce the likelihood that they will return for future business or purchase additional products.
- **"I'm sorry" must be authentic.** If you don't mean it, don't say it. It's not enough to just say the words, especially if your tone says, "not sorry." Authenticity is integral to empathy.
- **Reflect the customer.** Acknowledging the customer's feelings is an important first step. Phrases like, "I understand this has been frustrating for you," or "I can see this process has been very frustrating," go a long way to ease tensions early.
- **Empathy and sympathy aren't the same.** There is a subtle difference between empathy and sympathy. This video gives a great (and funny) illustration of the differences.

Respecting Customers' Time

"Oh my gosh, are we done yet?"

We've all been there. In a store or on the phone with someone who just keeps talking. You get the distinct feeling that the conversation/transaction could have wrapped up ten minutes ago, but they go on. Kind of like the Sloths in Zootopia.

Respecting our customers' time is an important way we show them they are our priority. If we rush them off the phone, they may feel like we're not giving them the attention they deserve. At the same time, if we go on and on, it can feel like we aren't paying attention to their needs. It's a delicate balancing act for both our internal and external meetings. Here are a few tips and tricks you can use to show your customer their time is important:

- **Pick up on verbal cues** they may be providing. If they mention they are in a hurry or on their way to another meeting, it's probably a sign to keep it short.

- **Identify the customer's pace** and try to match it. Often, mirroring the customer's tone and pace can help create a better interaction.

- For internal customers, **start and end meetings on time.** No one likes a meeting that goes too long, and there's a reason everyone talks about the "college rule." You know – the one where if the professor doesn't show up in the first fifteen minutes class is canceled? If you want a productive meeting, be mindful of the schedule.

- **Know when it's appropriate to interact on a personal level.** It's great to build rapport and relationships with customers, internal and external alike. It's important, though, that this doesn't stand in your way to tackling obstacles or solving issues. Be sure your interactions balance both carefully.

Customer Service and Email

Email is one of our primary communication methods, especially when working remotely or with team members in different departments. But if your inbox is anything like mine, it quickly fills up and sometimes you find yourself with more emails than you know what to do with. To make things worse, some of those emails aren't necessary but you still have to dig around to figure out what you need to do.

Mastering the art of the email can be a challenge. Written communication removes non-verbal cues and tone of voice which can contribute to misunderstandings and frustration. In the worst cases, email can make projects or initiatives even harder to deliver – like with these guys.

Here are a few ways to get the most bang for your buck with email communication:

- **Keep it Short and Sweet:** Avoid emails that go on forever – try to be as concise as possible. Otherwise, people may decide not to read it.

- **Take a Second Look:** Sometimes it's easy to type up a quick email in a hurry. That can lead to spelling and grammar errors or a tone that may seem short or terse. Take a second to re-read the email to be sure you've caught any errors.

- **Beware the Reply to All:** Don't reply to all if it isn't necessary. That's how you get 20 emails all saying "Thanks!" back to back.

- **Know When to Abandon Ship:** Not everything can be solved in an email. Sometimes it's easier to make a phone call than to try to cram everything into an email.

Virtual Meetings

"Am I still on mute?"
As COVID-19 continues to change the way we communicate with each other, virtual meetings are the new norm. In fact, many of us are using virtual platforms to meet with family members. Even Grandma is figuring out how to work the system.

A virtual meeting gone wrong can be painful. It can start to seem like the same issues come up no matter which meeting you are on. It's Groundhog Day except with muted phone lines, background noise, and everyone trying to talk at the same time. It's kind of like this.

Here are five things you can do to maximize your virtual meetings:

- **Mute and unmute:** We're all working in different environments. Whether it's kids or pets, background noise is hard to eliminate. Use your mute button to minimize the background noise, but don't forget to unmute when you start to talk.

- **Don't go AFK (away from keyboard):** It can be easy to keep the meeting up and then go do something else. We get it, meetings aren't always the most exciting thing. But if you go AFK and someone needs you, it gets very awkward.

- **Dial in early:** Technology is going to be technology sometimes. Trying to connect 3-4 minutes early can give you a cushion to work out any system issues that may happen.

- **Dedicate a space:** If you are like me, multiple people are trying to work from home in your house. Add kids, dogs, cats, and normal home life and it can get pretty hard to know where work ends and home begins. Find a space that you can dedicate for work to help create a better experience.

- **Engage participants:** It's hard enough to get everyone to participate in a meeting even when it's in person. If you are facilitating the meeting, try to actively call on individuals for their input so that everyone's voice is heard. Bonus! Maximize your camera so that they can hear and see you at your best. [Here](#) are some tips.

Transferring Customers

We've all been there. You call a company and end up playing ping pong between what seems like every single person who works there. At the end of the call, you've invested a lot of time and emotional effort and chances are your problem still isn't solved. It can start to feel a whole lot like [this](#).

No one can be expected to answer every question – well except maybe Wikipedia. Transferring customers to other individuals or departments is natural and necessary. HOW we make that transfer, though, can make all the difference in the world.

Here are five quick things you can do to help reduce customer frustration with transfers.

- **Tell the customer:** Let the customer know they are being transferred. It's an easy way to reduce confusion and frustration.

- **Stay on the line:** While this may not always be possible, if you can stay on the line to tell the person receiving the call the situation, it can save the customer time and energy.

- **Set the mood:** Let the customer know you are transferring them to someone who is especially equipped to handle their situation – an associate dedicated to solving just these kinds of issues. It sounds a lot better than "another department has to help you."

- **Minimize transfers:** If at all possible, help the customer yourself.

- **Educate for the future:** Give the customer the phone number of the group they need. If they get disconnected, they can call back, and they'll also have it for the future.

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