

Customer Service vs. Customer Experience

What's the difference?

By JIM FACENTE

In a recent customer satisfaction survey, 73 percent of customers said they didn't give up on a company because of poor product quality, poor service or price. They took their business elsewhere because they didn't feel appreciated.

Many believe customer service and customer experience are the same thing. But when you consider what they mean, you'll find there is a huge difference between customer service and customer experience.

Simply, customer service is WHAT you do. Customer experience is HOW you do it.

When we talk about customer service, it's something every dealership does. Every dealership sells parts, service and equipment. This means what you do is not unique and customer service is often viewed by customers as a commodity and not always memorable. As long as your customer service is delivered on time and without any surprises, your customers won't give it a second thought. The reason they don't give it a second thought is because that's what they expected. They expected you to perform the service you're in business to provide.

Customer experience, on the other hand, is much different. Customer experience is *HOW* you do what you do.

1. Do you do it in a way that evokes positive reactions from your customers?
2. Is it truly unique and uncustomary?
3. Does it make the customer stand back and say, "Wow, that was different?"

When your dealership achieves these three things, it becomes memorable to your customers. So, customer experience is not just meeting a customer's expectations, it's exceeding them. It's when you take an ordinary, everyday encounter and make it memorable.

The benefits of an exceptional customer experience

Consider this, when you put a customer's interest first, go the extra mile, have a positive attitude, and show appreciation for the customer's business, you are providing an exceptional customer experience.

When you provide an exceptional customer experience, there is indisputable evidence that it:

- creates customer loyalty,
- increases customer referrals,
- reduces price sensitivity,
- reduces the likelihood your customer will switch to a competitor,
- makes customers more tolerant and forgiving, and
- increases sales from existing customers without having to sell.

Putting customers first

An exceptional customer experience begins with your ability to assure customers that you're going to solve their problems – and that's why they come to you. They expect you to be a professional who will not only fix the problem but also reassure them their problems are going to be resolved.

Another key factor in gaining your customer's confidence is establishing credibility. You establish credibility and trust with customers when you show compassion, respect, competency, and display a positive attitude. You will lose credibility when you inflict too many minor wounds by saying things like, "I don't know," "That's not my department," or "I can't do that."

Other actions that create an exceptional customer experience include being a good listener, not interrupting what a customer is saying, showing genuine interest in a customer's problem, and not passing the customer around from department to department.

Customer appreciation is key

Drooling over customers might seem like a good thing but they really don't want to clean slobber off their clothing. They do, however, like feeling appreciated and appreciation is a key building block to creating a great customer experience.

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Top dealerships understand the importance of showing appreciation to their customers and are quick to say, "Thank you for your order, we really appreciate your business" or "Hey, I know we kid around a lot but we really value you as a customer and appreciate your business." Now you might think this sounds corny but take note of this: your customers don't think it's corny at all. Everyone wants to be told they're appreciated. If you don't feel compelled to show your customers you appreciate them, believe me when I say someone else will.

Who's the greatest?

Many people think the best way to build great relationships is to tell customers how great you are and then regale them with personal success stories. Nothing could be further from the truth. They're interested in their problems, getting the parts they need, getting their equipment repaired, and feeling appreciated.

If you want to build great relationships, ask your customers about their problems, their businesses, even their lives – and don't forget address them by their names. Most people love to talk about themselves and asking them to do so, by name, is magical.

As for personal greatness, you can cripple yourself and destroy relationships with customers by inflicting too many minor wounds, failing to take responsibility for mistakes and failing to communicate when things go bad.

As a former dealer principal, I constantly reminded my employees that customers won't always remember how much you know, what you say or what you do, but they will remember how you made them feel. **Be a hero to your customers.** WED



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Commit to being a **Top Performer**

Here are 10 ordinary things top performers do in an extraordinary manner.

- 1. They pay attention to the customer.** Top performers concentrate on the customer and do not allow themselves to become distracted.
- 2. They never interrupt the customer.** When you interrupt a customer, the customer gets the impression what he or she is saying is not important.
- 3. They listen when the customer interrupts.** They stop speaking and listen to the customer. This conveys to the customer you are listening and it's important.
- 4. They have outstanding manners.** Top performers use please, thank you and the customer's name – all three are magical in business.
- 5. They have a genuine interest.** Top performers display an attitude that shows their commitment to help.
- 6. They don't pass the customer around.** Top performers will never tell a customer they have the wrong department and handoff the customer to someone else.
- 7. They never blame their employers.** A top performer never uses company policy as an excuse to not help a customer.
- 8. They go the extra mile.** Customers enjoy the special attention they receive from employees who go the extra mile, which builds rapport and trust.
- 9. They show empathy.** Customers are more likely to be comfortable with employees who try to see things from their perspective.
- 10. They have a positive attitude.** No matter the situation, top performers are upbeat, have a can-do attitude and appear eager to solve a customer's problem.

Work these 10 things into your daily routine and they will take you – and your dealership – from ordinary to extraordinary.