

## Customer Service in Action

**When it comes to customer service, clients are usually looking for one of two things, solutions to problems or good feelings. Get it wrong and you could end up giving poor customer service!**

For instance, if you have a flat tyre, or are you running short of stock needed for production, you are looking for customer service that solves problems. But if you are going out to dinner at an expensive restaurant, buying a special outfit or having your hair styled, you are usually looking for good feelings.

It's surprising how often companies get this mixed up and offer the wrong kind of customer service.

One Thursday, I managed to splash red wine into my laptop. (It had been a very stressful week!). I didn't have a desktop computer, so I needed my laptop to run my business. I raced the computer along to my regular repair person, desperately seeking a solution to my problem. My dilemma was greeted with a big sigh, and "did I know that this wouldn't be covered by warranty, and he had a backlog of work". All very inconvenient for the repair person. In terms of customer service, I had not only been treated discourteously, but I had also been given even more problems to worry about.

If your business is about solutions to problems, then your customer service needs to take away the fears and solve the problems. There's nothing more comforting than to hear someone say, "Not a problem. We can have this fixed in no time".

On the other hand, when you're looking for good feelings, you're often made to feel bad.

For most women, going to the hairdresser is an occasion to be pampered and looked after. Good feelings can vanish when a snooty hairdresser asks, "When did you last wash your hair?", or, even worse, "who cut your hair last time?" Regardless of the reason for asking the question, the result is a client who feels like she's been reminded that she has dirty hair, or is somehow it's somehow her fault that her hair looks awful.

I love eating in restaurants, but I don't have a large appetite, so I often leave a portion of my meal, my enjoyment is often spoiled by a waiter or chef asking in a superior tone if "Madam was happy with the meal?". I understand the reason for asking, but I have a mother whose job is to make sure I eat my vegetables, so I don't need the chefs of Sydney to make me feel guilty about not cleaning my plate.

If you are in the business of giving good feelings, make sure that your customer service is light, bright and people focused.

For instance, a hair salon should be a positive environment for its target clients. It should have appropriate music in the salons. Staff should take time to chat and socialize with customers and delight clients with little extras, such as a glass of champagne or a free sample of a new product. You can also help customers keep that good feeling when they get home, with a photo of their new style (back and front) or a handwritten note with at home instructions for recreating the new look.

If you're in the business of solving problems, your style of customer service needs to be professional and to anticipate worries and concerns.

Many years ago, I needed to replace the gearbox in my car. I'm a motor moron when it comes to all things mechanical, so I was dreading the "now, look here, love" conversation. The first pleasant surprise was a clean and tidy workshop and a uniformed service person. On the wall were various diagrams of gearboxes with arrows and names to various bits. There was also a printed notice about the various types of repairs that may be needed and a service promise that detailed how they would help their customers. I was impressed, but really knocked for six when the mechanic who was quoting on my job took the time to explain what had gone wrong using the diagrams and alternative solutions.

I chose a reconditioned gearbox and was told that repair would take four days to allow time for delivery of the unit. Two days later, I received a phone call to say the car was ready. This was superb customer service that was totally focused on solving problems.

It's not just mechanics, the same principles apply to distributors, manufacturers or consultants. Generally speaking, most business to business services have predominantly solutions to problems focus. If you're not sure whether you're selling solutions to problems.

Ask yourself if a client gets up in the morning going. Whoopee, today I get to go and see my solicitor/accountant/ business consultant! Although good feelings may be the result of the meeting, they still come to you, looking for a solution to problems, as opposed to good feelings.