

Seven Customer Service Best Practices And Principles For Agents And Firms

1. Respond quickly. Today's clients expect speedier service than did any generation before them. (Not only speedier than their parents expected, but even than they themselves expected this time last year.)

2. Anticipate client wishes rather than just responding to them. When a client's wish is met before it's been expressed, that sends the message that you care about the client as an individual. To achieve this requires aligning your systems and your people to anticipate what your clients want before they ask for it. This involves hiring staff based on key client-friendly traits (specifically: warmth, empathy, a bias toward teamwork, conscientiousness, and optimism), aligning your systems to center on what clients really want from your processes, and never, ever, thinking you can save effort by trying to treat everyone the same.

3. Share information with clients—the more the better. You want your clients to feel empowered, and that comes from them knowing all the facts. Explain what they need to know and why, before they need it. Take away their confusion. And, according to Carl Sussman, "Don't assume they know what you think of as "common knowledge."

4. Be patient when filling positions in your firm. In a firm that's aiming for superb service, a single disagreeable or unresponsive team member can erode client loyalty and team morale. That is why it can be better to leave a position unfilled rather than rushing to hire someone unsuitable. More generally speaking, client excellence is most fully achieved once you become expert at recruiting, selecting, training, evaluating and reinforcing the efforts of service personnel.

5. Completely *nail* your hellos and goodbyes. Research shows that clients remember the first and last minutes of a service encounter more vividly—and for longer—than the rest of it. Make sure that the first and final elements of your client interactions are particularly well engineered, because they are going to stick in the client's memory.

6. Strive to remember—and acknowledge—each returning client in a personal manner. Work to achieve the (computer-assisted) effectiveness of a beloved bartender, doorman, or hairstylist — the kind who would know Bob's preferences, the name of Bob's pet, when Bob was there last ... (Of course, you also have to learn those details in the first place. Sussman: "It helps if we can break [in the course of a home search] for coffee or lunch so I can learn their personal history."

7. Don't just benchmark your service level against the prevailing standards at other real estate firms. It's time to raise your game and broaden your insights. Benchmark yourself against the best practices you can find throughout a variety of service-intensive industries, because that's what your clients will do. Every client interaction with you is judged based on expectations set by the best players in hospitality, the financial services industry, and other areas where experts have made a science of customer service.

Note: Some of this material is updated from earlier writings in real estate industry journals--
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