

Building the Right Culture

The five principles of technical customer service

by: Don Crawley, Compassionate Geek

Editor's Note: Don Crawley, author of "The Compassionate Geek," will present the keynote address, "How Leadership Affects Customer Service & How Customer Service Affects Your Bottom Line," at BTA IGNITE Orlando, March 20-21 at Disney's Yacht Club Resort in Orlando, Florida.

Learn more at www.bta.org/IGNITEOrlando.

Successful office technology providers build a culture of service based on five principles of customer service. Everything we teach and do at Compassionate Geek is also based on those same five principles. If you run your business or your career based on these five principles, your customers will stay with you longer, you will retain key employees and you will have less stress in your life.

What is Compassionate Customer Service?

Compassionate customer service is essential in the day-to-day operations of a business. It involves taking an active interest in the issues that your customers are facing and treating everyone with respect and dignity. Compassionate customer service is a must-have rather than just a should-have. Work to ensure that your employees can empathize with your customers, understand their changing emotions and be willing to go above and beyond to help solve their problems.

Here are the five principles of technical customer service:

(1) Technical Competence — The principle of technical competence seems obvious. If you work in a technical position such as a technician, support engineer or network administrator, you must have sufficient technical competence to meet the requirements of your job description. Similarly, if you run a technical business such as an MSP, your business must have sufficient technical competence to fulfill your promises to your customers. Service reps will improve relationships with customers when they resolve complex issues in a timely manner. Product knowledge comes first, but it is not the only principle that matters.

(2) Compassion — Compassion is caring and understanding. It is noticing someone who is hurting, frustrated or



angry and wanting to help. You demonstrate compassion by trying to alleviate the suffering of a customer struggling to work with a new system. You can show compassion by finding ways to simplify technology for a non-technical user. A compassionate person provides excel-

lent customer service when he (or she) realizes that many people try to hide their pain and frustration, and that no one fully knows another person's story. Compassionate people try to give others grace and not take things personally.

(3) Empathy — If compassion is knowing, empathy is feeling. When you are empathetic as an office technology specialist, you put yourself in the other person's position. You try to imagine what you would want if you were him. Think about a time when you took your car to a mechanic and you were at his mercy. You did not understand automotive mechanics. You did not want a detailed explanation. You simply wanted your car to work properly so you could get on with your life. Remember that no one is an expert on everything. Your customers and coworkers count on people like you to be experts on the systems you support so they do not have to be.

(4) Good Listening Skills — One of the most common reasons customers cite for enrolling their teams in our courses is a need for improved listening skills. People with good listening skills listen to understand and remember what the other person is saying. They listen in a way that shows respect for the person speaking.

Your listening skills can make or break your career. Good listeners use active listening techniques where they engage with the customer (or coworker) by asking relevant questions and giving body language cues that they are listening, such as nodding their heads and leaning in to the conversation. Good listeners never interrupt the person who is speaking, nor do they ever talk over the other person. Think about how annoying it is when someone interrupts you, talks over you or finishes sentences for you. Good listeners make the speaker feel heard, dignified and respected.

(5) Respect — There are two aspects to respect. One is

how you feel about the other person. People earn your respect by their words and actions. This principle, however, is about the other aspect — your behavior toward other people. It is about how you choose to act around others. You see, you do not need to feel respect for another person to act in a dignified and respectful manner around him. This is about holding yourself to a higher standard — not allowing yourself to get dragged down into the mud, mire and muck of someone else's degrading, thoughtless or disrespectful behavior.

Teach & Model the Five Principles for Your Team

Your team members represent your company. By teaching them these principles, you can create an excellent customer experience and help improve customer loyalty.

Remember, you must model the behaviors you want from your team. People do not do what you say, they do what you do. Focus on including positive language as a priority

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throughout your customer interactions to build trust with them.

Emphasize to your team the importance of following the five principles when interacting with customers, co-workers and anyone else you deal with. When you follow the five principles, you create lasting relationships built on trust and mutual respect, and that leads to better bottom-line performance. ■

Don Crawley, DTM, CSP, is the author of "The Compassionate Geek," "The 5 Principles of IT Customer Service Success" and seven other books for IT professionals on subjects ranging from Cisco firewalls to Linux servers. He has spoken for audiences in all 50 states, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, India and Oman. He holds multiple technical certifications and has been involved with technology since the 1970s. He can be reached at don@doncrawley.com. Visit <https://compassionategeek.com>.

