

## Six Principles for Creating the Ultimate Customer Experience - By Dr. Rick Johnson

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Service excellence starts with Inside Sales? Since customers buy expectations when they do business with your company, Inside Sales must be skilled at building sales relationships. Remember, 'Perceived Value Drives Customer Expectation' - 'Performance Value Drives Customer Satisfaction'. So exactly what does that mean?

It means that the higher you drive a customer's perceived value of you and your company, the closer you come to creating competitive advantage. This all starts with the relationship built by Outside Sales but just as importantly, the relationship built by Inside Sales.

Caution, don't drive customer expectations so high that you can not perform. That would be like shooting yourself in the foot.

Here are some common expectations of Inside Sales:

Product and applications knowledge, so they can answer questions during most customer calls versus transferring calls to others or having to call back with answers.

Customers expect Inside Sales to ask questions to learn the customer's needs and interests, problems experienced, and types of customers they serve so Inside Sales can help customers reach good buying decisions. Become skilled at the art of questioning

Provide accurate pricing, inventory, and delivery information so the customer can depend on it.

Keep customers informed about new products, special promotions, and company policies that affect the business relationship.

Provide timely follow-up to customer questions, timely solutions to problems, and timely complaint handling to ensure customer satisfaction.

Demonstrate a service excellence attitude that proves you value the customer's business.

Possess a sales mentality to help match the right products and the right services to customer needs.

Inside Sales is the primary day-to-day interface with the customer. By far, the majority of customer contacts are with the Inside Sales organization. From the customer's perspective, Inside Sales is the firing line where job performance proves the company's commitment to service excellence.

The actual tasks performed by an Inside Sales person vary widely from one company to the next. Job responsibilities depend upon industry experience, product knowledge, and can depend upon company size. The smaller the firm, the greater the tendency for Inside Sales to 'wear many hats'. The larger the company, the greater the potential for specialization where Inside Sales handle inbound calls and follow-up, with others doing purchasing, mailings, quotes, or providing technical support, for example. No matter the level of specialization or lack of it, every inbound call and customer contact is an opportunity to enhance your sales relationship and prove you deserve a customer's business.

### **Six Key Principles**

#### **PRINCIPLE #1: PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS.**

The truth about customers is: they are just like us! They like dealing with people who sound like they are smiling, who appear to enjoy their jobs, and who make customers want to deal with them. The perfectly processed and delivered order experience can be marred by a less than enthusiastic attitude. Though Inside Sales handles many calls each day, every call should demonstrate an energetic and positive 'can do' attitude. Don't underestimate the power of your tone or voice on the telephone. Like it or not, we judge others and customers judge us that way. Do you sound harried, bored, bothered or too busy to care? Or does your voice project an attitude that makes customers want to talk with you?

#### **PRINCIPLE #2: QUALITY PRODUCTS AND QUALITY SERVICE BEGIN WITH QUALITY THINKING!**

Customer service consists of a series of 'moments of truth' your customers experience with your company. Every person in the organization - even those you may not think of as customer service personnel - has the ability to make a positive impact on customer relations. This could be the way the telephone is answered, to your use of Voice Mail, to error-free orders, accurate billings, realistic promises made and kept, to the integrity of the information you provide, these are all moments of truth that affect sales relationships.

Customers expect Inside Sales to help them do business with your company, to solve problems, to coordinate with other people and departments. "What's the reason for the price difference between this order and my last one?" "Who should I talk with about a billing problem?" "How should I handle this return?" "Do you have a catalog you can mail me?" "Can you send me a sample of that?" "Can I get freight paid on that order?" Quality thinking means focusing on the customer's needs and making sure those needs are met.

### **PRINCIPLE #3: Make it 'Easy to do Business'!**

You have probably heard of the KISS principle: keep-it-simple-stupid. As funny as it may sound, it is really just good business practice. When customers find it easy to do business with you, they keep coming back for more. There is no secret to what keeps customers coming back for more, thereby contributing to the growth and profitability of your company. It's all about service and creating the ultimate customer experience.

Consider what it takes to gain a new customer. Prospecting for new accounts is the most costly of all selling tasks, yet new business is the lifeblood of the company and must be sought. Time must be invested into finding new customers, getting acquainted with their needs, selling them on the benefits of doing business with your company versus a competitor, and eventually getting that first order. By the time the first order is received, the company's investment of time and related costs typically mean there is no profit in the sale. It can take several orders just to break even on the prospecting investment after which the relationship  $\rightarrow$  presuming it is maintained  $\rightarrow$  becomes profitable to you and your company. Remember, if you don't take care of the customer --- Somebody else will!!

### **PRINCIPLE #4: Do It Right - Do It Right The First Time!**

What does an order taking error cost your company? How about the cost of a return goods authorization because the customer got the wrong product? What does an order pricing error cost? What is the real opportunity cost of a lost customer due to poor quality customer service?

Each time an order is handled more than once, handling costs increase through what is called cost-redundancy, i.e., doing the same task over again, only this time doing it right. An error can mean the order must be corrected and re-entered, a credit may need to be issued, another delivery must be made, the wrong product must be returned, and both you and your customer are inconvenienced.

Quality errors such as these can result in the ultimate loss to the company: a lost account. The real loss to the company is not just the value of the order in question. It is the life-long value the customer represents to the company presuming you did maintain repeat business with the customer.

Many times quality errors that cause accounts to become inactive go unnoticed for some time by the company. No one realizes the customer is gone and no one works to get the customer back.

### **PRINCIPLE #5: Understand Your Value Propositions**

What is the difference between your company and your competition? When that question is asked of some Inside Sales people, a common answer is: "We're about the same. We all have about the same products. Sometimes we have something in stock that the competition doesn't, so that's one difference I can think of."

Every company needs to determine their value propositions! These are the 'unique propositions' that set your company apart from the competition. Creating the Ultimate Customer Experience means you must employ your value propositions. Customers buy expectations when they do business with you, not products which can be purchased from any number of sources. They buy the expectation of getting the right products, shipped to the right place, at the right time, as ordered. They buy the expectation of dealing with someone who understands their needs and can match products and services to meet them. They buy the expectation that your products and product knowledge will help them make good buying decisions. They buy the expectation that doing business with you will somehow benefit them and help them achieve not only their purchasing objectives but many other objectives as well. They buy the expectation that doing business with you will make their jobs easier and solve their problems. Inside Sales is in a key position to demonstrate the company's value propositions and personal value propositions to help create the 'Ultimate Customer Experience'.

### **PRINCIPLE #6: EVERY JOB IS A SELF-PORTRAIT OF THOSE WHO DID IT!**

Whether taking an order, preparing a quote, sending a sample, handling a complaint, or coordinating with other internal customers (did you know others inside the company are your internal customers?), paying attention to the details, doing timely follow-up, respecting the other person's time as well as your own all create a professional "self-portrait." There is no question customers rely upon Inside Sales, that the Inside Sales role is critical to meeting customer expectations, achieving service excellence, and building lasting relationships with customers. When you focus on the customer and treat every task as the "self-portrait" it represents, you prove your commitment to service excellence.

Check out Rick's new CD series and workbook 'Unlocking the Secrets to Amazing Sales' @ <http://www.ceostrategist.com/resources-store/unlocking-the-secrets-to-amazing-sales-incredible-profits.html> It is a must addition for your sales training initiatives. Order today and get a bonus copy of Rick's book 'Turning Lone Wolves into Lead Wolves ---56 ideas to maximize sales.

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