

Outstanding Customer Service Simply Isn't Good Enough - By Nektaria Hamister, Matt O'Bryan, and Kent Sexton  
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*'If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded.'*

-Maya Angelou

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Some people serve willingly, cheerfully, and effectively. They 'meet and exceed expectations,' as the cliché goes. Others consider service a burdensome obligation. They half-perform their duties while secretly counting the minutes until the end of their shift.

Care, on the other hand, requires the personal engagement of the provider. When we care about people, we are concerned about their well-being, health, happiness, and success. Care means that we understand the importance of each individual with whom we come into contact.

The transition from service to caring requires that all staff—even members who traditionally have little or no contact with customers—adopt a care approach. In the past, many hotel housekeepers were silent and almost invisible. They made up rooms while guests were out and did not always greet guests or make eye contact in hallways. At Hamister Hospitality hotels, housekeeping plays a significant role in guest care. 'We all make eye contact and are open to helping people. If a guest needs something, any co-worker can take care of the situation on the spot. Customers flip over this,' Kent explains. 'Guests don't always fill out the 'reason for visit' box on the reservation form, so we don't usually learn the reason until after they arrive. Our housekeepers are expert conversationalists. They learn about people and how we can reach out to them.'

Matt and his staff at Health Services of Northern New York, a home care company, are also advocates of the care approach. 'When a scheduler is trying to assign a person to a new case, she too needs to think of herself as a caregiver. A service provider would call a personal care aide and say, 'I need you for a client from 8AM to 10AM. Can you take the case?' A caregiver says, 'We have a 78-year old woman with Parkinson's. She needs someone to help her in and out of the shower in the mornings. Can you help her?' This way the aide arrives at the house expecting to meet a person, not a chart. It's not about filling an open slot. It's about helping another human being.'

When Kent and his hotel staff learn the reason for a visit, they leave a card in the guest's room. 'It might say 'good luck on the job interview' or 'sorry for your loss' if someone is here for a funeral. We all sign it. This is a non-intrusive way of opening communication. It's like we knock on the door, but we don't go in unless invited. If a guest does not say anything, we don't make any efforts to reach out. We respect that person's space. If a guest says thank you, then we know that we have made a connection. We have let people know that we are glad that they are here, not just that the room is filled. And once the connection is made, it is easy to make it stronger and stronger.'

Home care is personal, private, and intrusive by nature. Sensitivity about where and when caregivers can make a personal connection is crucial: 'in home care, we already know the reason that we have been hired. So it's best for us to always let clients take the initiative with personal connection,' Matt comments. 'If someone prefers to talk only at hello and goodbye or during meals, then that's what we do. If another client enjoys chatting as a distraction during health or personal care times, we follow their lead. The care approach is about recognizing indicators.'

Care creates a lasting connection between a business and a customer. As Kent says, 'even the most independent people are social animals.' A smile, an offer of assistance when one is stressed, or a small surprise like movie tickets can be very meaningful. The care approach means that we treat customers like family, all staff members need to be involved in the search for little signs that someone might need a chat, a night out, or greater respect for his private space and distance. When we make the transition from service to care, the business-client relationship changes forever. This is what makes people return again and again for repeat business.

Kent Sexton is a hotel general manager with The Hamister Hospitality Group, LLC. Matt O'Bryan is the Administrator of Health Services of Northern New York, Inc. Nektaria Hamister is Vice President of Corporate Communications for The Hamister Group, Inc. For more information on The Hamister Group, Inc. and its affiliated companies, visit [www.hamistergroup.com](http://www.hamistergroup.com). Feedback and questions may be sent to Nektaria, Matt, and Kent at [news@hamistergroup.com](mailto:news@hamistergroup.com).

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