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15 Golden Rules of Customer Service

If you think about all the great and memorable experiences you have had at a restaurant or foodservice operation in the past year, you will most likely not be thinking of the place that offered the best tasting food or best prices, but probably the place where you received the best service.

GAINING CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Regardless of which industry you work in, a little bit of customer service can go a long way. Without customers, there is no business. Your customers pay your bills, your salary, your employees, and help keep your business alive.

In general, it costs a business five times as much to gain a new customer as it does to keep a current customer. So by offering great customer service, you increase your chances for repeat business. In the restaurant and foodservice industry especially, gaining customer loyalty, repeat business, and establishing relationships with your customers are the most important factors in running a successful operation.

I have compiled the 15 Golden Rules of Customer Service, and if you follow these rules, you will increase your chances of success substantially:

1. Greet your customers within 30 seconds

Whether your customers are calling your operation or walking through the door, always answer the phone or greet them within 30 seconds. Even if you are completely swamped, take the few seconds to say hello and let them know that you will be with them shortly.

There is nothing worse than ignoring potential or existing customers. Your customers need to know that you or your staff are aware that they are in your operation, and that you will be taking care of them as soon as you can.

2. Be attentive

Good service means never letting your customers feel forgotten. If your operation is experiencing some delays (which is often inevitable on busy nights), make sure you still give your customers your attention.

Regularly check on your customers, provide updates on the status of their orders, and offer a free appetizer or snack to tide them over. Customers need to know that you are doing your best to give them an enjoyable experience.

3. Be patient

Providing great service is much more important than fast service, so learning to be patient is a huge key to offering good customer service. Take the time that your customer needs to allow him/her to be comfortable in your operation, get all the information he/she needs to make a decision, and have an enjoyable and memorable experience. However...

4. Don't get caught up with the chatty customer

Being patient with one customer does not mean that you should be ignoring the other 20 customers in your restaurant. There are some customers that will demand much more time and attention than you have to spare. Politely inform those customers that you need to look

after some of the other customers, but will be right back to answer any questions he/she might have.

5. Hire great staff

Great customer service has to be provided by every single member of your team - from the hostess to the dishwasher. Good hiring practices will help your business establish a positive reputation and build repeat business.

When you hire staff, one of the key traits to look for is someone with a great attitude, and someone who is willing to get on board with your customer service practices. You cannot deal with every customer in your operation by yourself, so you need to be able to trust that your staff is also offering the best service possible.

6. Educate and encourage employees

Consider bringing in an outside consultant to educate and train your staff on customer service. A training course or workshop is a great way to ensure that every



member of your staff is on the same page and will handle situations in the same manner.

You never want one staff member to tell a customer one thing, only to have another staff member tell them something completely different. Therefore, a training manual is essential, so that there is no debate as to how a situation should be handled.

7. Be a leader

The number one reason that people quit their jobs is because of ineffective bosses or management. If you want to retain your great staff, you must be a great leader. Leadership skills are the single biggest influence on employee retention, and high staff turnover and poor morale will hurt customer service.

8. Pay attention to what your customers are saying

Whether your customers are paying you a compliment or making a complaint, it is critical for you to always listen to your customers. With all the distractions of cell phones, TVs and other handheld devices, it is very refreshing to give someone your undivided attention.

9. Never tell customers that they are wrong

No matter what the situation, never tell your customers that they are wrong. Instead, quickly offer a solution that will make it right. Even if your customer was the one at fault, you do not want to point fingers or make him/her feel embarrassed. The main priority is to sort out the problem and continue to ensure that your customers have an enjoyable experience in your operation.

10. There's no such word as "can't"

You should never tell a customer that you can't oblige a request. If best, tell them that you will try your best to give them what they want. If the request truly is unreasonable (for example, the request violates health or sanitary laws), be sure to clearly explain to your customer why you are unable to grant his/her request, and offer to make something that is close to what he/she wants.

11. Don't tell customers that "It's your policy"

There is nothing more infuriating for a customer than to hear than the words "It's our policy." This implies that your restaurant is inflexible and unwilling to work out a solution that will ensure that your customer has an enjoyable experience. You should have a list of policies for your staff, but not for your customers.

12. Work as a team

If a customer asks you for something, never tell them that it is not your job. Every member of your front of house staff should be trained to do each other's jobs so that every staff member is able to handle a customer's request in a polite and efficient manner.

For example, your service staff should work together as a team to ensure customer satisfaction, and not solely look after their own tables or section with no regard for any of the other customers in the dining room.

13. Take immediate action with unsatisfied customers

If one of your customers has expressed dissatisfaction with something, act on it immediately. Never make a customer have to

SERVICE

repeat his/her problem. If a team member is sending a manager or owner over to the table to deal with an issue, they should be fully briefed on the issue before arriving at the table and be approaching the customer with a solution.

14. Never say "I don't know"

If a customer has a question to which you do not know the answer, never reply with "I don't know." Instead, tell your customers that they have asked you a great question, and you will check it out immediately. This way, you have not only complimented your customer for asking a good question, but you have allowed yourself the opportunity to get the answer.

15 There's always room for improvement

Never be satisfied with the level of customer service that you provide. There is always room for improvement. Be sure to train and retrain your staff on a regular basis. Be in constant communication with your customers to see how you can improve your business every day.

BONUS POINT: Smile!

A friendly smile can go a long way. Not only does smiling improve the mood of your customers, it will also improve your own mood. Go ahead and smile to yourself right now. Don't you feel better already?

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