

ASK
YOURSELF

Am I

GREAT

at Customer Service?

*25 Characteristics
of People Great at
Customer Service*

ED GAGNON

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, Donald and Eleanor Gagnon, who have always provided me with love and support of my decisions through my education, marriage, work, and life in general.

I also want to recognize my wife, Alicia, for her ongoing support of what I do, continuous faith in the guiding principles of my work, and belief in the value of customer service. She's a wonderful friend, coach, supporter, and example of what it means to be a great person.

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ISBN: 1452845018
ISBN-13: 9781452845012
Library of Congress Control Number: 2010906359

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Introduction

Are you great at customer service?

I don't mean good or above average. I don't mean "Are you nice?" or "Do you have a warm smile?" I mean, are you GREAT at customer service?

If you are reading this book, maybe it is because you want to be great. Maybe it's because you think you are, or you're getting very close. Maybe you were given this book because somebody wants you to be great. Or, just maybe, you just care about continuously trying to learn how to get better.

Whatever your reason for reading this, it's important to have an understanding of what this book is intended to do. It's intended to paint a picture of some of the most important characteristics that people demonstrate who want to be great at customer service.

So much of the world today, particularly in America, is driven by service industries. Even if you are in a manufacturing industry, there are so many functions that require you to serve others, serve clients, serve internal customers, and even serve vendors and suppliers.

So this can apply to virtually anybody who – as part of their role – needs to serve and satisfy others.

The key characteristics discussed in this book have been determined by Customer Service Solutions, Inc. co-founder Ed Gagnon based on his 20+ years of work in the world of customer service. If you become highly effective at living these principles, taking on these traits, and continuously trying to do better in building your attitude and skills, then you will be

taking a dynamic step toward reaching the very top level of the occupation you undertake.

We give you guidelines on what these important characteristics are, we tell you stories to illustrate what it looks like when these characteristics are lived as well as when these characteristics are ignored. And we give you a series of self-tests so that you can evaluate yourself and determine “Am I Great at...Customer Service?”

In the television show “So You Think You Can Dance,” thousands of people audition for the show thinking they’re great dancers. But many are REALLY wrong about this self-assessment!

We’ve conducted customer service training sessions where participants (especially early on in the session) say “I know all about customer service...why do I keep having to come back to these courses?” Usually, it becomes readily apparent during the session that these folks don’t exactly have service attitudes or the best skills out there, even though they think they’re great.

But there are truly some outstanding customer service-oriented people in this world. Do you think you’re one of them?

It’s fine to think you’re great at customer service. Confidence is an important part of service success. But we need to understand what it takes to be on the road to greatness. We’ll provide you with 100 questions to consider and 25 key qualities to strive to develop.

We hope this book helps you to learn, to grow, and to become great!

CSS Background

Customer Service Solutions, Inc. is a management consulting firm focused entirely on customer service and client retention. CSS has conducted research and provided consulting and training services since 1998. This book has been crafted from the thousands and thousands of mystery shopping experiences (where we and our shoppers pose as customers to evaluate telephone, e-mail, onsite, and website experiences for our clients). The characteristics were defined through the observations of those who are great (and those not so great) in the world of customer service.

The skills are taken directly from much of the training content that we provide to clients, where we guide them in how to improve communications with, relationships with, and satisfaction from their customers. We have conducted hundreds of projects, trained thousands of individuals on many of the principles and skills noted in this book. Now we are using all our experience and expertise to provide this core set of key characteristics for anyone wanting to be great at customer service.

Enjoy learning about customer service.

We want you to be GREAT!

**Is Your
Attitude Great?**

People who are great at customer service are typically more upbeat, hopeful, focused more on what can be done instead of what can't be done. Is that you?

You need to have the attitude that drives success. That's an attitude of "yes we can," of "I hope so," of "it's got a better chance to be a great day if I try to make it a great day."

How full is the cup?

People Great at Customer Service...

Have a Positive Orientation

What is your mindset on a typical day? Is it a mindset of what can be done or what can't be done? Individuals who are great at customer service have a mindset of "*how can I help a customer achieve their goal, how can I address their needs, how can I say 'yes' to what will accomplish that goal even if I have to say 'no' to the particular solution or method or timeframe that they desire?*"

People who are negative seem to ooze negativity; it's like an odor that permeates their being and impacts both customers and co-workers alike. Sure they may smile and tell jokes occasionally, but there's a certain air about them that dampens the laughter and questions the sincerity of the smile. There's an orientation of "No" or "*We've already tried that*" or "*That won't work.*"

Your attitude and orientation are choices. Maybe they're learned behaviors, but they are habits that can change for people who are wired more negatively.

People who are great at customer service are inherently more positive.

Illustrating the point...

It was a simple little exercise, but it made the impression of a lifetime. The social studies teacher told his freshman high school class to take an index card, and he asked each student to write their name at the top. So Rickie put his name at the top of the card. Then the teacher said to start passing the cards

up and down the rows until everyone had written one positive thing about the person whose name was on the card.

After the exercise was done, Rickie and his classmates got their own cards back, and Rickie began to read. It was great to read the positive things his classmates said about him. But of all the comments, one stuck out. One classmate wrote “Never a bad word about anybody.” Rickie sat and smiled; it was nice that somebody would notice and appreciate that about him. Rickie took the initials of each word that made up that statement and was proud to be a NABWAA. It was his way to remember a characteristic that he didn’t want to change.

But as Rickie became Rick the adult, it became harder and harder to be a NABWAA. There were lots of people he worked with who complained about co-workers or about customers. They’d gripe about management or about some vendor. It was a way to socialize and bond – one person says something negative about someone else, and they both agree.

Maybe this was part of being an adult in the workforce. After all, people need to vent their frustrations sometimes.

But some people took it too far. It seemed like ALL they did was talk negatively about others. It was like it was their quest to put others down. Rick wasn’t sure if the reason for all the negativity was to vent or for folks to build themselves up by badmouthing the others. Rick began to realize that, for these people, there was never a GOOD word about anybody. They were NAGWAAs.

The more he spent time with them, the more he found himself bad-mouthing co-workers and customers, the less fun work was, and the more negative he got in general.

You see, NAGWAAs are often self-centered. When an issue arises, what’s important is who’s to blame (as long as it’s

not them). When asked for help, they focus on what cannot be done. When they’re uncertain, they focus on the likelihood of failure instead of the possibility of success.

The NAGWAAs were like a corporate cancer bringing negativity into his work life and having that filter into his mindset at home.

Don’t be a NAGWAA.

Rate Yourself

Rate Your Level of Agreement:

3 = *Strongly Agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 1 = *Do Not Agree*

1. I clearly communicate to the customer or co-worker that I want to help them.

Rating: _____

2. I am more focused on resolving the issue than determining who is to blame.

Rating: _____

3. I am more focused on conveying to the customer or co-worker what I can do or what they can do rather than what I cannot or they cannot do.

Rating: _____

4. I try to convey realistic hope to the customer or co-worker instead of consistent doubt.

Rating: _____

Total Chapter Score: _____

Record your Total Score in the “Calculate Your Greatness” table at the end of this Section.



Questions to Consider – Write Responses Below

Do you try to see the positive side of circumstances?

Do people sense that you care about them and their needs?

Do you help to create an upbeat, realistic but hopeful, and positive environment with co-workers and customers?

How can you create a more positive mindset?

What's the balance in your knowledge bank?

People Great at Customer Service...

Hone Their Knowledge/Skills

People who are great at customer service have the knowledge and skills to be successful. They realize that attitude is only a piece of the puzzle. In customer service, an employee's knowledge can be placed into three different categories:

- **Knowledge of Your Customer.** An individual employee's knowledge of his or her customers stems from an inquisitive nature. Ask yourself: Do I try to gather information on my customers? Do I ask customers questions to determine who they are, what their situations are, and what they truly need?
- **Knowledge of Your Products and Services.** This is where the best employees, those who are great at customer service, have such a great wealth of knowledge of the products and services their organization has to offer that they have a greater set of alternatives from which to choose. They are therefore more able to meet an individual customer's needs and goals.
- **Knowledge of Your Policies and Procedures.** The more knowledgeable you are, both in terms of how things are done and what can and cannot be done, the more creative you can be in addressing customers' needs and issues.

Illustrating the point...

One of my favorite sports/business quotes is from Vince Lombardi, former Head Coach of the Green Bay Packers. He stated that “A man who is trained to his peak capacity will gain confidence. Confidence is contagious and so is lack of confidence, and a customer will recognize both.”

What Lombardi advocates is for individuals to have and convey confidence in their capabilities, in their company, in their job, in their product, in their services. Customers notice confidence, and they are attracted to and made confident by confident employees. So if employees want to be confident, how do they do that?

First, know your customer. The better you know your customer, the more confident you can be that you’re suggesting the right solution to their problem. Next, know your product/service. The more knowledgeable you are of what you offer, the better you can speak to the benefits of and appropriate application of that product. Also, know your policies and procedures. If you know **HOW** your services are delivered, you’ll instill confidence in the mind of the customer that the fulfillment process will work to their liking.

To help the customer feel confident in you and your service, know your customers, your products/services, and your policies and procedures.

Rate Yourself

Rate Your Level of Agreement:

3 = *Strongly Agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 1 = *Do Not Agree*

1. I know my customers very well, or I ask questions to get to know them well.
Rating: _____
2. I am very knowledgeable about our company’s policies and procedures.
Rating: _____
3. I am very knowledgeable about our product and service offerings.
Rating: _____
4. I am very good at applying the appropriate policy, procedure, product, and/or service to the situation based on the customer and their needs.
Rating: _____

Total Chapter Score: _____

Record your Total Score in the “Calculate Your Greatness” table at the end of this Section.

