



Setting-and Exceeding- Customer Expectations

Make every point of contact with your business extraordinary

By CHRIS TOOKER

How Can I Help You?

Customer service as the final, most important pillar of Personal Branding

To be successful in delivery excellent customer service, you need to understand your market. What level of satisfaction are clients currently experiencing, and where is there room for improvement? How is the market responding to the typical level of service? Once you're aware of what is being offered, you'll start to recognize a difference in how customers expect to be treated and how they are treated. That's your opening.

The key to establishing a reputation for excellent service is to set the customer's expectations at the outset, then meet or exceed those expectations without fail. Customer service is where the sizzle of marketing meets the steak of performance, and how you care for your customers will either reinforce your Personal Brand or bury it under a flood of false promises.

Build a Reputation and Back it Up

As a "solopreneur", you've no doubt learned that the key to survival and success in the competitive business world is repeat and referral business. But in reality, enhancing your Personal Brand through customer service is a three-part process represented by the "Three R's": **Recognition**, **Repetition**, and **Reputation**.

Recognition

For customers to see the value in what you do for them, you must communicate to them your delivery methods, timing, quality of products and processes, and so on. Don't assume they know all the things you do for them. Make sure they see the value you create through extra services, small courtesies or ways you save them money.

A great way to help customers appreciate the things you do is to follow the "under-promise, over-deliver" principle. This means accepting a job at \$750, but getting it done for \$500 and hand-delivering a \$250 check to your delighted customer. You're managing customer expectations.

Repetition

A strong reputation comes from trust, and trust comes from delivering on promises again and again! As you build your customer's trust, they come to know you – not for what you say but for what you do. This is a great position to be in. Once your customers trust you, you'll find referrals rolling in.

Reputation

Finally you've developed the reputation as someone who makes good on promises and goes the extra mile to give customers an outstanding experience, every time. You've turned customer service into the foundation of your growing enterprise. Now, shake that foundation. Ask customers to describe for you what they like and dislike the most about your service. You'll discover if the areas you think are of value are also of value to your customers...and you'll also have to be accountable for shortfalls in your customer service. Own up to the failings, ask the customer how you can improve these areas, and use this as an opportunity to grow yourself, your business and your reputation. As an added benefit, you'll gain even more customer goodwill as they feel like part of your team and realize that their opinions are valued.

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Be Honorable, Not Perfect

Finally, remember that a reputation for excellent service doesn't come from being perfect. It comes from constantly doing your best, especially when you fall short. Customers appreciate when you take responsibility for a problem, respond without them having to be the "bad guy", and restore their faith by going above and beyond the call of duty to correct the problem and show them you appreciate the business. Everyone makes mistakes; smart businesses admit to them, fix them gracefully and learn from them.

Chris Tooker is President and CEO of Chris Tooker Training, a company specializing in improving customer relations for growing companies. He can be reached by e-mail at ctooker@christooker.com or (949) 305-9998.