

Connect With Your Customers¹

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Let's face it. Without a dependable stream of customers, organizations would cease to exist.

This is particularly true in today's world, a world in which customers are more informed and more interconnected through a burgeoning variety of social media. One bad customer experience can spread like wildfire among thousands of existing and potential customers.

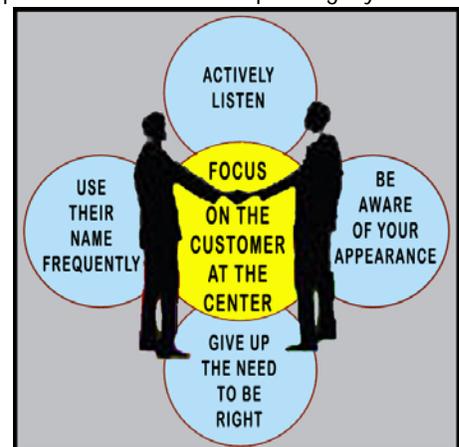
It is urgent, more now than ever before, that organizations treat customers like kings and queens. Following are some suggestions to help you do that.

First Impressions

Let's begin with first impressions. Whether your first contact with a customer is in person or by telephone, making customers happy begins with first impressions.

According to researchers, we form opinions about people within the first 17 seconds of our contact with them. In other words, we have a very short time to lay the foundation for creating a positive customer experience. Following are five simple tips for establishing a positive first impression.

1. **Appearance counts.** Neatness and cleanliness demonstrate respect. Appearance includes our speaking style. People judge our intelligence, our cultural level, our education, even our leadership ability by the words we select—and by how we say them.
2. **Focus on the customer at the center.** Demonstrate immediately that the other person—not you—is the center of action and conversation. Express a genuine interest and concern with what they have to say.
3. **Use their name frequently.** Make a point of immediately learning and remembering their name. Use it frequently. This will tell them that you see and are interested in them personally, that you are not simply holding a pre-scripted conversation.
4. **Give up the need to be right.** When you confront someone you've just met, you can destroy rapport before you even start building it. Wait until you've established credibility before you challenge another's statements.
5. **Don't fail to follow these tips.** Build a positive first impression! Connect with your customers!



¹ From: http://www.arniedahlke.com/120630_Connect_With_Your_Customers.pdf.
Take a moment to explore my previous Timely Tips at: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

Actively Listen With Empathy

1. **Actively listen.** Be an active listener. Everybody wants to be listened to. Reflect back to them what they have said so they know you have heard them. Ask them clarifying questions. If you are talking to someone face to face, keep in mind that you nonverbally show you're a skilled listener by maintaining steady eye contact.
2. **Listen with Empathy.** The word "empathy" comes from a German word (einführung) which means "feeling into." You are successfully listening with empathy when another person knows that you know how he or she feels. And, the only way you can genuinely know how people feel is if their expression of feeling touches a feeling that has meaning to you, personally



You are listening with empathy when you choke up as you hear your small child wailing because he fell down. You are listening with empathy when you lean forward in your seat, all tensed up as you watch a hero struggling through a tough situation in an adventure movie. *As an empathic listener to your customer, you feel the world as he or she feels it.* In other words, you feel the world from his or her point of view. That is *you* being customer-responsive.

2. **Don't get lost in your customer's feelings.** However, one caution: listening with empathy does not mean that you get lost in your customer's feelings. Don't get so empathetic with a negative feeling a customer has about your product or service that you, yourself, start running it down. That would be counter-productive. Listening with empathy is more effective when you let your customer know that you understand how he or she feels while at the same time you do not lose your own objectivity or personal point of view. Always remember to use your head.



3. **Problem-Solve.** Remember that you are *problem-solving* with your customer. You need the analytical part of you to lead you in that process, to tell you what comes next—not the feeling part.

4. **Put your customer at ease.** Finally, there is a special side effect of actively listening with empathy. The more you are able to listen to customers with empathy, the more you will put them at ease. The more you put them at ease, the more they will open up to you. The more you will learn about them. The more you will understand their wants and needs. You will then be engaged in mutual problem-solving.

You will then be a more connected, customer-responsive person!

Respect Your Customer's Time, Not Your Own Time!

Did you know that how we perceive time is a function of our age? According to a J.D. Power study, 69% of Post-Baby Boomers are OK with an auto dealership Service staff taking five minutes or more to acknowledge and help them. For Baby Boomers this drops to 64% who are OK with five minutes or more. In the youngest group, the Gen-X customers, this drops even further, to 59% who feel that way.



Apparently perceptions of time differs with age. Many Post-Baby Boomers are retired and time is less important. But for Gen-Xer's, where instant gratification is expected, instant or very quick response is important. In other words, urgency has turned into a lifestyle for younger people. For Baby Boomers, the world is beginning to look like it is moving faster and faster, but for Gen-Xer's, the pace is normal and expected. The perception of time itself varies between age groups! Be constantly alert for ways to sharpen your processes with your customer's *time* in mind.



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