



## AUTHORS



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## 10 #Custserv Behaviors That Guarantee Unhappy Customers

We all want happy customers, but every day support teams face the possibility of failure — often through self-sabotage! These 10 behaviors can push your customers toward the competition:

### #1. Bypass Clear Standards of Service

Intuition and experience are hallmarks of a great customer support rep, but trust is what matters to customers. Trust that their needs will be met in a responsive way. Trust that you understand their issues. Trust that every employee on your team is well trained and capable of efficient problem resolution.

Without clearly identified standards and process, support and service can be unpredictable and appear slipshod to today's high-expectation customer. Everyone who participates in support needs a common language, a common (and current) knowledge base. Without great resources and training, you'll be sending mixed messages about your team's competence. Service and support are not places to be casual. Keep your team more effective by codifying clear standards for customer care.

## #2. Practice Arrogance

There's a fine line between a positive, confident attitude and arrogance. You may be smart, have great intuition, and pride yourself on responsiveness — but everyone has gaps and limitations. Make a practice of constant learning. Solicit ideas from others throughout the company to help with customer service. Lots of other departments and teams work with customers, and you can discover and augment your knowledge using their experience. There's a wealth of valuable information just waiting to be tapped. Encourage a culture of curiosity and use the results to boost customer loyalty and satisfaction.

## #3. Avoid the Uncomfortable

The customer's scathing email or angry voicemail...or a rep's increasingly negative attitude — these downers can capsize a day. All organizations have difficulty dealing with uncomfortable situations. But that can't stop you from tackling these issues head on. Whether the problem is with your supervision, your c-suite, or your team, the issues won't be resolved without intervention.

Conflict resolution may not be your favorite thing to do, but dealing with conflict does lead to clarity. Well-handled conflicts can be the key to awareness and strong relationships (both on your team and with customers). What's needed is compassion and curiosity — and empathy for the other person's point of view. Prepare in advance — and ask for help if you need it — when an issue is particularly thorny so you can be responsive rather than reactive. But don't put things off for too long. Often, the most complex challenges are easily solved with strong communication.

## #4. Prioritize Tasks Over People

Have you ever waited while an employee finished some paperwork before helping you? Are you fed up with “Hold, please”? Or how about when a member of the waitstaff counts their tips and chats with a co-worker before taking your order? It's irritating. The customer always comes first — before any task, any chore. Yes, of course there's a juggling contest involved in this, but the customer should never wait for your convenience. Review any point of customer contact where tasks interfere with your ability to be

attentive — and change the process to let the customer know that their time and experience is most important.

## 5. Foster Negative Team Competition

It's not your intention to create internal competition that drives down revenues, but you might be unintentionally contributing to customer dissatisfaction with your compensation models. A CEO I worked with saw sales go up dramatically when he changed individual commissions to a commission pool. His sales team now works collaboratively so that customers experience seamless service that's not dependent on individual sales staff schedules.

Lesson learned: If employees feel it's not safe to work collaboratively or share problems, bad things happen. Teams that support one another are more likely to find solutions that lead to customer satisfaction.

## #6. View Customers As Problems, Not People

Your body language and tone of voice contribute more to communication than you might expect. Customers can *read* your dislike or mistrust of them. It affects their experience and lowers the odds that they will do business with you again. Customer service and support staff need to understand that mindset matters. An angry or complaining customer is not attacking the rep, they are a person looking for help. When you understand that it's not personal, it's easier to deal with the issue at hand. See their harsh words as a call for help and give yourself the challenge of converting them from negative to positive. Make it a personal challenge to focus on strengthening relationships.

## #7. Rush Through Customer Issues

A big part of satisfying customer issues is just listening and validating concerns. Don't be too quick to interrupt and jump to a solution. Think about your own experiences where you've felt dismissed and frustrated. Slow down and let the customer vent. Validate their feelings and needs first. Then, offer a solution. Those additional moments of patience will be time well spent!

## #8. Postpone Investment in Core Competency

You should never stop learning. It's what leads to the continuous improvement in behaviors and processes that mean ongoing relevance. Investment in continuous improvement is not optional. The more you improve your customer support team's understanding and knowledge about customer care, the more relevant you will be. Read the best books. Stay current on trends. Share your discoveries internally. Invest time and money in coaching and [training](#).

#### #9. Let the Outliers Ruin #Custserv for Everybody

There will always be a few customers who try to abuse a policy or game the system, take advantage, lie, or cheat. It's tempting to make the 98% of good customers suffer because of these outliers. Are your policies to protect yourself from the 2% having a negative impact on the rest? They may be more destructive than helpful. Look at them with an eye toward the numbers, and lighten up a little.

#### #10. Blow Your Chance to Make a Great Last Impression

First impressions get all the attention, but last impressions have an equally strong role to play in customer service. As each customer interaction draws to a close, you have an opportunity to generate good feelings about working with you. Those last impressions, well...they leave a lasting impression. Make sure that all their issues have been dealt with. Review what you've accomplished on their behalf. Thank them! Tell them you'll be happy to help them in the future. This "wrap up" matters, because it influences how likely they are to give a positive review to friends, families, and even review sites.

Make those last moments count. Be memorable — in a good way!

*Marilyn Suttle is a customer experience expert, professional conference speaker, and coauthor of the bestselling book, [Who's Your Gladys? How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan](#). Marilyn delivers customer service and communication skills keynotes and workshops, to help her audiences create strong, productive relationships in every area of life.*

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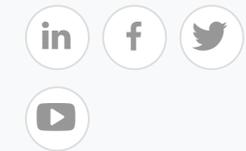
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