

## **SECTION 1**

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## Chapter 1

### Why Make the Effort to Provide Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client?

*Communication is the first and last word in customer service.*

Your success or failure swings on your ability to communicate clearly, succinctly, tactfully, confidently, and congruently. It seems simple and obvious. I can picture you raising an eyebrow, thinking “*Okay, Bob, when are you going to tell me something new?*”

The concept that communication is at the core of all customer service may indeed be obvious to you. It may be the first lesson you learned in Business 101. It may be the first lesson you teach your employees. It may even be the one thing you try to hammer into their heads every day at every opportunity. Yet what is it in action, and how do you know when you are doing it well?

It’s good to share the concept with your employees, remind them of it, point to a sign or poster on the wall that celebrates “communication” with some well-worn phrase, and even admonish them to practice “good communication” with your customers and clients. How do you teach it? What is this communication “it” everyone is talking about?

Communication is actually a complex arrangement of many parts, and developing it into

something you do well requires awareness and vigilance. It seems simple because we are all born communicating in one way or another. Whether it's successful or ineffectual, we're all doing it.

Something else we all participate in is the exchange of goods and services. In one form or another, customer service is a part of every business. We know that to survive in business we need to provide everyone who walks through the door, calls on the phone or checks us out on the Internet with good customer service – *Exceptional Care*.

We all get to be customers, too, so we all learn to know good service when we see it, or rather, notice when it's absent. Customer service is so common it must be easy to define, right? You know when it's good and you sure as heck know when it's bad. But can you identify each of the components that went into its success or failure?

The key to providing "*Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client*" lies in being able to do just that: identify each piece of the communication puzzle, develop it, refine it, and use it properly to build a complete and empowering customer service program. The C.A.R.E. we are talking about stands for "*Customers Are Really Everything*". If you are in business, your *customers/clients* are your most important reason for staying in business.

If you are motivated to learn something new about communication so you, too, can dramatically increase the standard of customer service your business provides; then you have come to the right place. Shifting your current view of customer service and changing your models and patterns of delivery, are what *shifting your paradigm* is all about. These are the key steps to raising the bar for providing *Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client*.

If you are sincere in your desire to change the way you perceive your world of providing customer service, and set a new example as a model and pattern to revolutionize your business, keep reading.

If you are cynical and ready to challenge these notions as they unfold, have at it. Please, take every word, lesson and explanation I put forward here and test it out. I am always excited to hear what happens when people apply my concepts to their lives and businesses.

I am going to take you through the fundamentals of my cornerstone philosophy, “There is Power in the Clarity of Your Articulation,” as shared and taught in my life-changing communication program “Remember the Ice and Other Paradigm Shifts.” As I do so, I will show you how to apply each lesson to the world of customer service in a way that will show you, how empowering the shifts in your communication and customer service paradigms can be.

I will show you exactly how to identify when you are communicating well, when you need to make better choices, and most importantly, how to apply the information in these pages so you can start making effective and powerful word choice work for you.

Until you are able to do that you will continue to offer the same kind of service you always have, be it good, bad or indifferent. If you are reading this book, chances are you suspect something in your organization needs to change, or you understand there is always room for improvement. Great customer service, or the ability to provide “*Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client*,” relies completely on great communication skills.

If you gauge your company’s customer service skills by how well you meet quotas or the sum total of survey results, then you are missing the big picture. Whatever strides you think you are making will come to a swift end. Those tools have their uses, however, when you focus on information that tells you how to shut the barn door after the horses have run out then you are putting yourself behind the competition. And we all know what it means when we’re behind someone else: They get to be ahead. In business, that means they are the ones who win and get all the good customers.

Focus on the beginning point, the barn before the scene is disrupted. Be proactive. Gauge your company's customer service skills by a new set of standards. Take care of what you already have, and your customers will have no reason to be tempted away.

With this book I hope to show you that your beginning point in all things to do with customer service is: Communication. Start with providing "*Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client*" as your end goal, and you can expect rewarding and empowering payoffs.

Let's take a second to understand what a "good customer" is. Here is a list of attributes, in random order. Place them in the order of importance that makes the most sense to you.

- A good customer comes in, conducts his or her business, and leaves
- A good customer engages in conversation or small talk
- A good customer is a repeat customer
- A good customer has a lot of questions
- A good customer has very few or no questions
- A good customer pays on time
- A good customer brings other good customers to your door
- A good customer never complains, even when things go wrong
- A good customer points out problems and expects you to solve them

What did you put at the top of your list? If you led with "A good customer pays on time," then once again, you are missing the point. Yes, a good customer does pay on time, however I believe this attribute comes in behind "A good customer is a repeat customer" and "A good customer brings other good customers to your door." These two, placed ahead of the rest, remind us that repeat and expanded business are the goals; they bring in a lot more money than a single transaction, and frankly, that's what keeps your business alive. This book is about valued clients, which is a concept that encompasses relationship.

Relationship can take the shape of a customer who comes back every week for 10 years, or it can take the shape of a customer who is just passing through town or who stops by once every 10 years.

Regardless of the breadth and depth of the relationship potential you think you have with a customer or client, your goal with each and every one of them must be to make an impression, to stand out, and to create what I call a “Signature Moment” that makes your business memorable for all the right reasons.

A signature moment is an intentionally created experience which leaves the customer walking away with a positive thought, feeling, memory or acknowledgment about you, your employee or your business. It is that magic something that brings the customer walking back through your door time and time again. Your word choice and your communication skills make signature moments possible.

That is the beginning of your relationship. If you forget to do that, you might as well go home for the night. We will explore signature moments in depth later in the book. For now, know that the key to creating them is – you guessed it – *communication*.

It’s easy to see why you would want to create signature moments for local consumers and develop relationships with those who can return to hire your services with predictable regularity. You need and want them to come back, so you naturally make an effort to be the business they want to work with consistently. The more transitory relationships can be a little harder to get behind, yet make no mistake: The customer “just passing through” may have limited influence over other consumers in your town, however nowadays he could have the ability to influence overlapping consumer communities of hundreds and even thousands of people who rely on the internet as a resource.

Consider this a precautionary tale, in case you have trouble identifying with the need to establish and maintain relationships with the people who walk in and out your front door, make an effort to call you on the phone, or choose to click on your web-site instead of another

business.

The world is much smaller than it used to be. You may have the only import car dealership in your county, yet if you are unwilling to bend over backwards to get your customer exactly what she wants with leather, seat warmers, and a DVD player for the kids, she will jump on-line and find what she wants somewhere else in the country.

Then she'll tell her neighbors what she did when you were unable to help, how great it was, and how happy she is with her new car. Later that day, she will take pictures of her new car and put them up on her Facebook and MySpace pages and brag about how resourceful she was in her search for the perfect car. Friends will ask how she did it and she will post her answers in great detail for all to see.

Next, she will also write a glowing review on that other dealer's web site, pointing out how you frustrated her so much she had to turn to them for what she wanted, and will gush about their great service. Keep in mind whether she spells it out or leaves it out, the implication will hang in the air that you were more than unsatisfactory; you were so bad that you drove her out of the county, maybe even out of the state to find what you failed to provide.

Then, she will jump on a different kind of review site, one designed for people who need help deciding where to buy their next car, and she will outline the process she chose and what led her to a different option all over again. Can you guess how many people she just influenced?

Every single person who interacts with you and your business has a voice and a number of platforms from which to tell his or her story. The current culture encourages individuals to use the Internet to reach out to communities of other users to either direct them to your front door or steer them away. And a growing number of people believe it is their duty to do so.

Customer review sites like Yelp.com, Angieslist.com and Epinions.com are full of anecdotal

evidence that can either elevate or condemn the reputation of a business. Reviewers, who, on a whole, represent the average consumer, base the way they rate a business and whether they recommend others to use it on personal experiences. Their first-person reviews have nothing to do with company policies, projected ROI statistics, survey results, corporate dictums, market shares, or any other behind-the-scenes information. Their reviews are based entirely on how it felt to be your customer. Their “customer experience” is what matters most to them.

Very few care why a shelf is empty in the store; they just care that the shelf was empty. Rare that anyone cares that the manager’s baby was up all night with a fever, or a pipe burst in his house, or the car broke down on the way in; they just care that the manager was short-tempered and abrasive.

On this kind of web site with consumer-generated reviews, the comments are on a par with what you would hear from your best friend, and tend to be candid accounts of a combination of the reviewer’s actual and perceived experience.

The empty shelf and the rude behavior are posted on-line and they become your reputation. Fight that with a stick.

I find this very exciting! I see it as yet one more opportunity to show “There is Power in the Clarity of Your Articulation.” Think of it this way: When you learn to harness your word choice, you gain control over your reputation. A review site on the Internet makes up another realm where you can shine. It requires vigilance; you have to be aware of how and what you communicate consistently. Fortunately, the purpose of this book is to teach you how to do just that. You have the potential to find yourself in control of the framework of your reputation, even on-line.

Play your cards right, and your spectacular communication skills could possibly attract

customers to your door from further away than you had ever considered.

If you have a business in an area with a busy tourist trade, for example, it may be tempting to see the tourist who walks in as one person in a flood of people who will never be back again, who has no real influence in your community, who matters less than the locals who come in all the time. Why hold a conversation, make extra effort, or even make eye contact? Another tourist will be along in a minute.

Let's rethink that for a moment. Tourists, in particular, like to post reviews on sites like Tripadvisor.com, a site offering an arena for both excited and weary travelers to share their views on how they were treated as they sojourned. They post personal and sometimes emotionally charged ratings of places where they ate, slept and shopped, as well as what activities they experienced on vacation, and how they were treated with each interaction. They do so because they know other people who are planning trips to the same spot will be jumping online to research what they want to see and do, and where they want to spend their money.

This practice is by no means limited to people traveling outside their usual spending zones, and it reminds us that every customer interaction, no matter how brief, demands our attention. Have you used a site like Yelp.com to help you find a florist or a dentist? Locals refer to these websites for opinions about restaurants they have walked by a "million times" however, have yet to walk into, beauty salons they always wondered about but were afraid to go to because the name struck them as strange, and places like consignment stores that could have anything from cheap, out-dated stock to high-end designer labels.

Essentially, going to a website for information is akin to getting a recommendation from a friend; online reviews from amateurs who write outside the professional arena of the critic or work outside the industry they're writing about are deemed to be unbiased and therefore easier to

trust.

So how do you create and keep the “good customers” who return to do business with you and/or bring other customers to your door? Maybe it will help if we change our word choice from “good customer” to “happy customer.” You will see it immediately eliminates a number of the attributes listed above.

- A happy customer comes back time and time again.
- A happy customer brings other customers to your door.
- A happy customer asks questions.
- A happy customer makes conversation, even if it’s just small talk.
- A happy customer points out a problem, trusting you to create a solution.
- A happy customer pays on time.

In a nutshell, a happy customer is one who believes they have forged a bond or some sort of connection with you. A little bit goes a long way to building this connection; a warm greeting and a smile of recognition can instantly create the belief in your customer: “I’m welcome here.”

The customer with a problem/concern will do one of two things. This customer will suffer in silence and then broadcast the news in public, when and where it’s too late for you to do anything about it. Or, this customer will call you on it; give you the opportunity to explain, apologize, solve or repair the situation, and then go out and broadcast the news in public.

The way you incorporate communication skills in your *Exceptional Care* paradigm will dictate what this customer says to you, and then what he or she says to everyone else. The customer who suffered silently will outline and focus on the details of the problem. The customer who brings it to your attention will still outline the problem, and will also outline what you did about it. If the results were pleasing, the review will be glowing. Which would you prefer?

Fortunately, you already have all the tools you need to help your customers associate *your* business with where they feel most comfortable and confident conducting *their* business. It is

just a matter of learning what the tools are, what they're for, why they're important, and how to use them. The fun part comes with the fact that each of your employees has them, too. They bring these tools to work with them every day.

Imagine what you can build together once you have taught them what you learn here! When you focus on creating happy customers, you get rewarded with good customers. ***“Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client”*** says it all. Take care of them, and they will take care of you.

Challenges within the greater economy make it absolutely essential to address and adjust what you're doing to serve your existing clients. Success depends first and foremost on how you communicate with them and what you do to make them want to bring their friends and family into contact with you. Create a strong fan base within the customer group you already have and the other potential customers out there that you want to attract will come along virtually on their own.

We will be using the term ***Exceptional Care*** throughout the book to re-frame the old paradigm of Customer Service to a new paradigm of going above and beyond your client's expectations to provide “exceptional care” to them. Create Signature Moments for them. Be memorable.

Provide ***Exceptional Care for Your Valued Client!***