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# The Nine Definitive Laws of Customer Service Excellence

In the retail world, no matter what you are selling, the ultimate goal is loyalty.

We all know it takes more to get a new client than to keep an existing one, but today it takes a lot to win the heart, mind and loyalty of that customer. The consumer is savvy. You have to build trust, nurture a relationship where the customer thinks their needs are more important than making the sale or making a profit. Then, and only then, will they go beyond just buying your product or service to recommending you to others as well.

Here are nine things I believe are the 'definitive laws' when it comes to serving customers.

**1. Be in business for your customers**  
My father was a small-business owner in Manchester, England. When I opened my first modest retail business in 1978, he gave me some simple but profound advice. He said, "Be in business for your customers. Look after your customers and they will look after you." He lived by these

words himself and had a long list of customers who would go back to his store every week. I believe these words ring true whether your business is small or multinational. Customers want to know that they matter and that you value them.

**2. Exceed your customer's expectations every time, not your expectations**  
In today's world, there is great pressure to deliver results to the corporation. In the end, however, it is not financial metrics that

count; it is how well your customer thinks you are doing! You may successfully sell to a client once, but having them come back or recommend you to others is based on how well you exceeded their expectations for the experience. Solicit, encourage and seek out feedback at every opportunity. And act on your customer's recommendations.

### 3. Show one face

How often have you gone to a restaurant or store and been wowed by the service experience, only to go back the next time and be disappointed. More often than not, you will not go back again. Consistency is key when serving the customer. They want to know that every time they speak to you or someone from your organisation, they are going to be treated with the same respect. This means training your people and setting expectations that will lead to consistent treatment of customers.

### 4. Build good relationships

If people don't like or trust you, they will not do business with you. Today, few companies have a product or service that has no competitor or alternative. In almost every industry, sales and service is a relationship game. Yes, the product needs to deliver and be dependable, but it is the relationship and experience the customer has that will dictate whether they come back to you or buy the next time from someone else. Building strong relationships with your customers is imperative and just makes good business sense.

### 5. Be a great listener

Most people like to talk, but few of us truly listen. Listening means to really invest in and focus on what the customer is saying. Follow the 80:20 rule: talk 20 per cent of the time and listen 80 per cent of the time. Dale Carnegie said, "You will make more friends in two months by being interested in other people than you will in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." How often has one of your friends recommended a company to you because "they really listened to my issue or need"? It differentiates you from your competitors.

### 6. Respect and appreciate your customer

We all like to feel special. This is why reward programs that differentiate the frequent purchaser from the occasional purchaser are successful, particularly when they point to differentiated service levels.

*"There is only one boss: the customer. And he can fire everybody in the company, from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else." - Sam Walton, Founder of Wal-Mart*

This shows respect and appreciation for valued customers. Now, not all industries, companies or products lend themselves to loyalty programs, but that doesn't mean you cannot recognise your valued customers. Take time to keep in touch, follow up on the most recent purchase. Never underestimate the power of a thank-you call or a handwritten note. Never take your customer for granted and they will stay loyal to you.

### 7. Understand your target market

Sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking that all customers are the target customers, and in some industries that is true. But in many, there is a target market that warrants extra effort and focus. When you know who the target is, then it is all about knowing intimately what this customer wants and needs and crafting your offering to exceed this. Conduct regular surveys, use mystery shoppers, or competitive intelligence to understand evolving needs of your customer and how you are delivering. Know where you are making the mark and where you are failing, and make the necessary changes.

### 8. Prioritise complaint handling

I know that it is hard to imagine, but despite all your efforts, you can't please everyone. How you handle customers who are not happy will say a lot about you and your company, and determine how you will be seen by your customers. And remember that in today's world of technology, dissatisfaction can spread like wildfire – but so can exceptional resolution of problems. Listen to the problems, don't be defensive, show empathy, and focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions. Flawless execution from the start should always be the goal, but empathetic and quick action on misses, problems and issues will also serve to build loyalty with customers.

### 9. Create a culture of excellence and consistency

When we talk about culture, it means that there is no other option; this is simply the way we do things around here. This is created through the behaviours of the leaders: what is recognised, what is rewarded, and what is punished. When I started out in retail, the company I worked for was passionate about excellence and consistency. It instilled in me and every employee a culture of excellence through

training, reward, and recognition. We treated each and every customer like they were the most important person in the world – nothing was too much trouble, and everyone within the organisation spoke with the same level of commitment to the customer relationship. Invest in this, no matter how challenging. Develop that culture, develop your people. Products are largely replaceable, but service and relationship is what makes one organisation stand out over another. Remember those who serve are those who rule in business.

Some final words of wisdom:

- It takes years to build up one's reputation, a very short time to ruin it. You are only as good as your last customer service interaction.
- Leadership matters. Earlier this year, I happened to be in New York City and visited the world-famous department store Macy's for the first time. As I walked into the store, just as it was opening, and wandered down to the men's department, the senior store managers were walking around the store, greeting each associate by their first name and having short, personal conversations with them and wishing them a great day. The positive impact on the associates was noticeable.

Any company has the opportunity to have an impact on the people who connect with the customer. It means getting out with the people. It is amazing what you can learn and the impact you can have. It is a small but an important investment in success.

Consider the acronym below:

- Customer
- Awareness
- Results in
- Excellent
- Service

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*Charles Marcus is a business-savvy motivational speaker, success strategist, and best-selling author. His client list includes internationally recognised names such as American Express, Hilton International, Mercedes-Benz, McDonald's Corporation, Schneider Electric, Northrop Grumman, and Special Olympics. He has a proven track record of making a difference in individuals and teams globally and inspiring them to higher performance and success.*

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