

## ***Is Customer Service Your Secret Weapon?***

Throughout my career of training over one hundred thousand sales, leadership and service professionals, the one area that stands out the most is customer service. Why? The Customer Service Representative (CSR) is on the front line and sometimes buried deep in the trenches. The differences are not necessarily limited to skills and aptitude. It all seems to come back to one area - **attitude**. The two approaches I witnessed were one of being pleasant, friendly, with a willingness to serve, while the other was negative, condescending and basically suffering from the syndrome “the customer is the enemy.” Which one do you have at your company? Our customer service is our secret weapon, or is it “the customer is the enemy?” Let’s explore this phenomenon together as I share my 30+ years of some experiences. Are you ready? Strap in and hold on because we’re about to embark on an adventure!

### ***“The Customer is the Enemy”***

Man O man, I must be missing it, or something! What’s happening out there with our customers? Right now, because of the volatility going on in our markets, how do we keep and retain our customers? Every company (including my own) should be ramping up on their customer service, just to maintain and keep marketshare. It’s times like this where companies who cut back will lose out while others, who remain aggressive by investing in their people, training and systems, move ahead and capture marketshare. When the economy bounces back, these companies experience accelerated growth, while the others flounder and try to rebound, losing marketshare. In the meantime, customers continue to jump ship, playing vendors against each other and adding “fuel to the fire” with pent up demands, by releasing smaller orders with less frequency. On top of that, with all of the changes going on internally with restructuring and cost containment, customers aren’t being treated very well at all. In fact, so many have lamented to me how rude and angry CSRs are to them with one customer stating, “You’d think I was the enemy or something!”

Not too long ago I was interviewing a sales manager and he went off on a tangent about responding and handling customer complaints in a timely manner. How many of you have been through this scenario? The sales rep promises a certain date or delivery time and ops fails to meet it! In the heat of battle with the customer, the rep blames ops, ops blames shipping and shipping blames it all back on the customer. That’s right! The customer becomes

the enemy!! We laughed it off during our discussion, but in all seriousness there was a major problem internally in this company. They suffered from the “customer is the enemy” syndrome. It wasn’t surprising to hear about all the quality issues and infighting going on with everyone blaming everyone, pointing fingers and making excuses. Meanwhile, customers were going elsewhere as the company continued going down the death spiral.

### ***Changing the Culture***

I’ve been privileged to have worked with some world-class customer service teams in my career. They all exhibit similar characteristics: strong leaders, team atmosphere with the structure and disciplines in place and a passion to serve people. Customers are not stupid! They can sense when someone is willing to serve and help them out. Customer service is a human experience that is based on interaction between the service provider and the customer. It’s people serving people on the same level. It’s not technology and machines! I met with a company who had the most sophisticated phone system I’ve ever seen. It was cool! But, the organization still failed. My conclusion was it’s harder to serve each other internally, than serving our customers externally.

A company can’t change until the people change. With all of the economic turmoil and internal changes happening, it’s no wonder customers are feeling neglected right now. The center or nucleus of company culture is its people. So start internally first, by getting your people to understand and commit to change, by working together as a team and serving each other. What happens when you get your act together, internally? Everyone is in alignment with a common goal and serving with a purpose – all about helping our customers. I can sense a service culture the moment I enter a call center or department. It’s a feeling or attitude being displayed by all associates. It’s emotional, with laughter and heightened discussions going on internally and externally. It’s quite an experience to witness a true service and sales culture that’s all about the customer and not just about them. The sooner you can start working with your people internally, the sooner you’ll witness a change in your culture and have a team of people committed to do it. Solve your people issues internally and watch your service culture evolve. Remember, it’s never too late to start the change process.

## ***Training Becomes the Vehicle for Change***

15 to 20 years ago I used to preach that training cannot solve management problems. Guess what? I was wrong! In the last 20 years, I've seen training become the vehicle to communicate change and solve problems. If the company who had the most sophisticated phone system would have spent a fraction of that cost on customer service training, they would still be here today. But they procrastinated, kept changing leaders and witnessed a complete turnover of associates without the structure and disciplines in place. No wonder they went under. As a fellow Druckerite, I believe structure must follow strategy in order to implement change. And, the only way to communicate all this is through training.

Customer Service training is not about telephone techniques and fancy slogans or themes. Customer Service training should be about understanding people, personalities and especially behavior. Today, people skills are needed now more than ever before. Service is a human experience and it's emotional. When you demonstrate a willingness to serve and the customer senses it, you exceed their expectations because they're thinking you're not going to help them! It sounds so simple, but it isn't. It should be common sense, but is it? Remember what Mark Twain said about common sense? It isn't very common, after all!

Developing and training your associates on customer service skills is not easy. Most people resist change and the training that comes with it. Your training must be structured and tie directly into your strategic initiatives, reflecting your culture now and where you want it to be. Your training must allow an "ownership to the process." Without it, people won't buy into it, which creates further problems.

If you're struggling with training or tired of the cookie cutter approach contact us or go to our website: [www.butlerlearning.com](http://www.butlerlearning.com)

After 50+ years of working with worldclass service organizations we have the service skills training to help create and build a new customer service culture. Don't allow "the customer is the enemy" syndrome to bring you down. Allow your customer service to become your "secret weapon" in order to differentiate from your competitors! We are here to serve you, so give us a call.

Good Luck & Good Servicing!

Bob Butler, TSP

*Bob Butler is president and CEO for Butler Learning Systems (BLS). BLS provides sales training, consulting, leadership development and service excellence...enhancing relationships and changing lives. BLS has emerged as the "sales training expert" after nearly 50 years.*

*Bob is truly "The Sales Professional®," celebrating over 30 years of experience in the sales trenches and as a sales trainer. He has co-authored numerous sales training programs with his father and founder of BLS, Don Butler. He is a "product of the product."*

Butler Learning Systems  
1325 W. Dorothy Lane  
Dayton, OH 45409  
Phone: 888-298-7462  
Fax: 866-298-5022  
E-mail: [info@butlerlearningsystems.com](mailto:info@butlerlearningsystems.com)  
Website: [www.butlerlearning.com](http://www.butlerlearning.com)