

Battling Perceptions

Providing great customer
service in purchasing

Who Saw It Clearly?



Question

Who wanted to do this when they grew up?



“The Purchasing Division has been described as an obstacle to get around, difficult to deal with, rule driven, and, at times, incompetent. As a new buyer, what would you do to change this perception?”

*— City of San Buenaventura
Interview Question – Nov 2002*

How You Communicate Shapes Perception

- Purchasing is NOT the enemy to progress



“Customers perceive service in their own unique, idiosyncratic, emotional, erratic, irrational, end-of-the-day and totally human terms. Perception is all there is.”

— Tom Peters

Why Do We Care?

Jeffrey Gitomer's
LITTLE GREEN BOOK
of
**GETTING
YOUR
WAY**



*How to Speak, Write, Present,
Persuade, Influence, and Sell
Your Point of View to Others*

“The cost of fixing the wrong, making amends, and making it right... is ALWAYS less than the cost of an upset (angry) customer and a negative story that is retold about you for years.”

— Jeffery Gitomer

What Is Customer Service?

It's Tough To Define



Customer Services vs. Government Customer Service

Should they look different?



Customer Service

Any contact, whether active or passive, between a customer and a company, that **causes a negative or positive perception by a customer**. The perception will be influenced to be either positive or negative by the customer's expectations of the contact having been met, exceeded or disappointed.



serv·ice

the occupation or
ployment b) a
armed forces 3.
gious ceremony
b) benefit; adv
also, profession

Let's Define Our Customer

- **Call it out:**
Who is our customer?



How Can We Help?

- Clear answers
- Order updates
- Guidance and support



Do We Give Them Help? Not Quite.

- Our policy says ...
- I'm doing the best I can
- There's a lot of other people in front of you
- I'm either on the phone or away from my desk



Defining What We Do

Three quick examples

Example 1

Mission statement:

- The ABC School District*, in partnership with business and our diverse family-oriented community, is committed to providing a safe, nurturing learning experience, superior educators, and high academic standards that produce responsible citizens, effective communicators, and creative problem solvers who have a passion for life-long learning and are capable of achieving their full potential with the skills to successfully compete in an ever-changing global environment.

**Name changed to protect the innocent*



Example 2

City Purchasing Division old mission statement:

- To manage and coordinate the procurement of the city's supplies and services with integrity and professionalism, providing support, counsel and service to the organization and the community.

To negotiate, purchase and contract in an open, competitive, fair manner; securing maximum value for public funds through ethical, effective purchasing practices and high standards of excellence.

To listen, be objective, respectful, and patient; using what we hear and experience as motivation to learn and grow; and to enjoy our work with a spirit of teamwork, enthusiasm, and fun.



Example 3

City Purchasing Division new mission statement:

- Finding the best products, at the best value.



Build Customer Service Buy-In

Keep it simple, direct, and ongoing

Same Job, Different Perspective

An observer visited two job sites and asked employees to describe their work:

- **Employee one:** “I’m working hard for too little pay”
- **Employee two:** “I’m building a cathedral”



*"Success is not final, failure is not fatal:
it is the courage to continue that counts."*

— Winston Churchill

Move Forward Better

- Use the right tools for the challenge
- Be willing to change approach when needed
- Question “the way we’ve always done it”
- Focus on what works best today
- Put people and resources where they can have the greatest impact



“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”

— Elie Wisel

“You can take great people, highly trained and motivated, and put them in a lousy system, and the system will win every time.”

*— Geary Rummler, president
The Rummler-Bache Group*

You don't need permission
from a boss to make a
customer feel great

Confuse the
customer with
facts, policies
and law

OR

Become the
trusted
authority in all
aspects of the
job.

Do Your Clients Trust Your Recommendations?

- Move your clients to a trusting position
- The customer is always right!



Assume Best Intentions

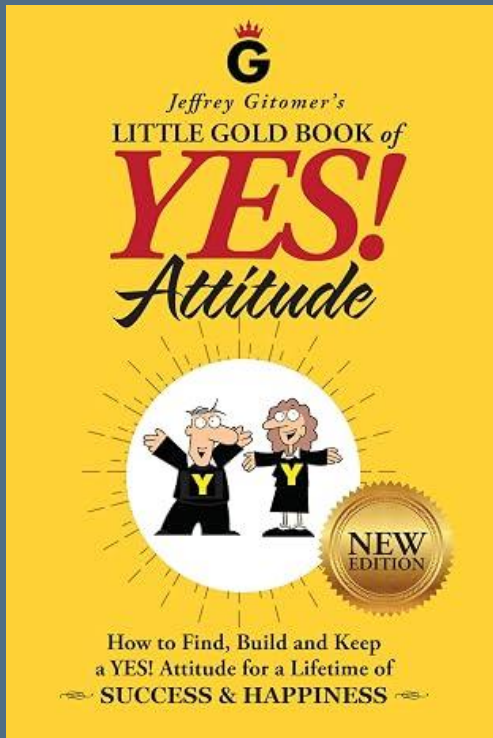


~~“It’s our policy.”~~

“Never say, “That’s against company policy” unless you have a good ‘why’ explanation to back up the policy.”

*— Mary Kay Ash, Founder
Mary Kay Cosmetics*

Bias in the Workplace



“Angry customers may have health problems, spouse problems or money problems, and they may be taking it out on you. Take it seriously, not personally.”

— Jeffery Gitomer

Tone and Intent – The wrong
words almost ALWAYS have
the wrong intent

Problem-Causing Phrases

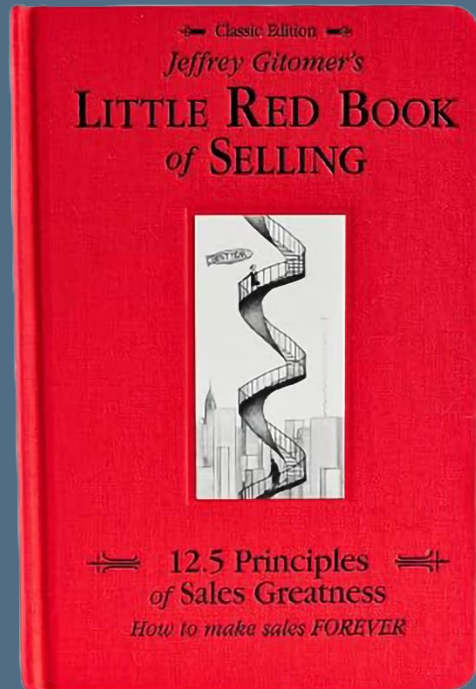
- It's our policy
- There's no way...
- We've done all we can
- You can talk to the manager, but she'll tell you the same thing
- You're not the only one
- They don't pay me enough



Start With the Right Words

- Great!
- That's my favorite problem!
- I'm sure there's a way ...
- Yes! Cool! Can Do!
- The best way to handle that is ...
- The easiest way to get that is ...





*“Give me liberty or give me death”
is a principle. People are willing to
die for their principles; very few are
willing to die for their policy.”*

— Jeffery Gitomer

Customer Feedback –
Customer Satisfaction is
Priceless!

“Don’t find a fault. Find a remedy.”

— Henry Ford

Earning Credibility

Earning Credibility

- Be a positive point of contact
- Know your product
- Provide a service
- Communicate
- Celebrate



Be a Positive Point of Contact

- Purchasing is the last stop on a long journey
- Negativity will affect outcomes
- Offer help
- Recognize slips from standard performance



Know Your Product

- What are you selling?
- Know your rules and procedures
- Know your capabilities
- Know your limitations



Provide a Service.
What do you add to the
process?

“How do you customize a commodity? You standardize the commodity and customize the services that surround it.”

— Stanley Davis (Morgan Stanley)

Communicate

Purchasing is seen as the “black hole” of paperwork, so:

- Encourage personal communication
- Answer e-mail
- Answer the telephone
- Discuss success and failure
- An uninformed customer = a suspicious customer



Celebrate!
Market to your clients and
your superiors

Create a Customer Service Environment

- Have fun
- Make sure customer service is a requirement, not an option.
- Establish published service standards.
- Your customers are people. They deserve to be treated as individuals.



Is High-Quality Service Expensive?

- Great service starts with attitude, care, urgency, and courtesy
- Customers remember how well the basics are delivered
- Consistency builds trust and protects your reputation



“One of the surest signs of a bad or declining relationship with a customer is the absence of complaints...The customer is either not being candid or not being contacted.”

— Theodore Levitt, Harvard University

Thank you



Dan Marran, CPPO, C.P.M.

Director of Government Accounts

218-895-4204

dan.marran@sourcewell-mn.gov