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The Big 7 of Service

by Laurie Guest

The term 101 means “introductory level”, but experience tells me a lot of us have either skipped the class or forgotten what we were taught. I think customer service and weight loss have a lot in common. I’ve battled a weight problem my entire life. A few years ago, I went to see the doctor. He said, “Laurie, I’ve got to ask you a question. How is it possible that a motivational speaker can have a weight problem?” I said, “Well, that’s easy. I see the golden arches, I’m motivated to turn in.” We all know that if you burn more than you eat, you’ll lose weight, but knowing and doing are two very different things. I believe customer service works the same way. We can teach customer service 101, but is the staff really doing it?

I’m passionate about the topic of Hello 101 because I’ve seen firsthand the large percent of companies that believe they have great service. They even include that phrase in their mission statement. In reality, knowing and doing are two different things. The way a building looks, the way the staff appears, and certainly the overall impression factors into the decision to try and buy. After secret shopping many companies, I started teaching the Big 7 of Service. As you read, rate yourself on a 1 to 5 scale on your ability to consistently deliver on each of the Big 7.

1 Eye Contact

The foundation of any connection starts with looking directly at the guest with an intention to serve. What do I mean by that? Simply looking at a person is not the same as establishing eye contact. The difference between looking at someone and making a connection impacts the degree of engagement. Do you really see the person and acknowledge her or his presence? Even if you are already involved with another guest or on the phone, you can accomplish this task in a way that makes the visitor feel a connection.

2 Smile

One of the easiest steps is often skipped, the smile. I think it’s missing sometimes because smiling is supposed to be natural and genuine. When an employee is at work, he or she may not feel like smiling for one of many reasons: too tired, too stressed, too overworked. The employee may not want to be there or simply lacks commitment to the mission of the organization. Excuses don’t matter. I remember back in my healthcare days, there were many times when I did not want to get up and go to the clinic. When I arrived at work, however, I knew it was time to focus on the patient and really put my energy into helping people to be healthier and to see better. It became more than just another day. If you don’t feel like smiling, it’s hard to do it. To put it bluntly, they call it work for a reason. Even if you have to force a smile, it will make a big difference in your performance.

Also, whether you believe it or not, a greeting without a smile and a greeting with a smile sound different. Try it. You can hear the difference in tone, which will make a difference in your customer service.

3 Showing Signs of Familiarity

Dale Carnegie once said that a person’s name is to them the sweetest sound in any language. People love to hear their names. Have you ever been a frequent visitor to a business where they not only call you by name but also know what you want even before you ask? I have multiple vendors like that. My dry cleaning manager pulls my clothes from the rack as soon as he sees my car pull up. At our favorite Chinese restaurant, the owner usually greets us with our standing order as we take a booth. It’s like when a friend comes to visit my home. They feel comfortable enough to open the fridge and get what they need or place their coat in the closet as though they live there. A feeling of importance or familiarity makes us feel connected.

4 Posture

What does “ready position” look like in your company? As a secret shopper for over a decade, I have stories to tell. Take a banker who greeted a shopper with the phrase, “Hold on a sec. Let me get my shoes on” or side conversations between employees that didn’t stop when the guest appeared or the receptionist at a doctor’s office who was eating a

cinnamon bun and licking the frosting off her fingers before she extended a pen to me to sign in with. Ready position is the behavior that needs to be taught in orientation. An assumption is made that staff will know what is logical and professional. Based on my experience, it needs to be taught. As a team, make time to discuss how posture plays a role in your service, then work to improve your ready position.

5 Greetings Not Recordings

One of the toughest aspects about greetings that is they need to be short, genuine, and repeatable without sounding like a recording. Years ago, I would visit Blockbuster. As soon as the door opened, I would hear employees shout, “Helloooooo.” in a long, drawn-out, fake-sounding voice. They must have been trained to say hello to everybody as quickly as possible. Even if the staff member was in the back of the store, you’d hear them yell out, “Helloooooo.” What about the people who have a fake sound? They pick up the phone and say, “It’s a great day at the Shoe Den!” in an automated and expressionless voice. Speaking of automated, the question “How are you?” should be replaced as well. Depending on your specific industry or service, try a script that gets to the core of the connection.

For example, “Good morning, thanks for stopping in. My name is Laurie. Please let me know how I can help you today.” When a second guest arrives, change it up a little bit. “Hello, welcome. I’m Laurie, and I’m here to answer any questions you might have.” Develop a few of these greetings that feel natural to you and then rotate them. Change it up so it’s genuine. Be real by being present in the exchange.

6 Shaking Hands When It’s Appropriate

In all honesty, I’m not a fan of the handshake in general. I wish our society would change to a special wave that has the cultural meaning of the handshake without the touching, but until that happens, a handshake in many industries is common. Interestingly enough, I’ve never seen anyone teach a handshake to adults. One question that comes up has to do with who should extend a hand first. Keep in mind, the answer can vary according to culture, but in the United States, etiquette says the person with greater authority or age should be the first to reach out. If you’re going for a job interview or meeting your in-laws for the first time, wait for them to make the first move. What about customers?

Research did not provide me with one right answer. Therefore, in my opinion, what makes sense is to shake hands when it feels natural and right. As a team, decide if a handshake is mandatory or should it be left up to the individual. I always reach out to my clients with a handshake upon arrival. I greet with a big smile, say the person’s name, and follow my own advice on how to shake.

7 Remember Who You Greet

The final entry on the Big 7 proves to be challenging in large retail situations. I walked into my grocery store, and an employee in produce greeted me with, “Good morning. How are you?” Then about fifteen minutes later, I was over in the frozen foods section, and I saw the same employee again, “Hello. How are you today?” It was if he had never seen me before. This decreased the value of the hello. If you’re going to use it, try to find a little memory technique that tells you that you’ve already greeted that person. When you see that person again, you just smile as you go by. Once you’ve said hello, try really hard to remember that guest is covered.

If you rated yourself on the Big 7 as you read, how did you score? Though the steps may seem elementary, start paying attention to places where you feel your service has been lacking. I bet that what you find missing falls somewhere in the Big 7.

