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Hi, Robin. Here is your e-newsletter for July 26, 2011.

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The Six Stages of World Class Customer Service

Provide the Highest Quality

Customer loyalty may seem a myth from the distant past. In these days of intense competition -- both from brick-and-mortar businesses and e-commerce operations -- a company either provides *quality customer service* or pays the price of failure.

That's simply because today's customers demand it. If they don't get the service they want from you, they know they can take their business elsewhere. And potential new customers are comparing your service with your competitors. So where to do you start when you want to bolster your efforts to keep customers happy?

"Customer service does not come from a manual. It comes from the heart. When it comes to taking care of the customer, you can never do too much and there is no wrong way if it comes from the heart!"

**- Debra J. Fields,
President of Mrs. Fields, Inc.**

First, set up an executive task force with the power to make changes. Let your staff know about the task force and how important customer service is to you. This tells them that your company is committed to the project. Then, roll up your sleeves and get to work.

Here are six stages to more successful customer relations.

Stage 1: Commit to your clientele. Get a handle on what your customers want and need. Vow that your company will be responsive. Keep an eye on your competitors' service too. You might get a few tips.

Stage 2: Get feedback. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Ask your staff and customers what works and what doesn't. This gives you a benchmark for measuring improvement. Then, decide what direction to take. If you find your system works for your organization, but not for

your clientele, it's time to re-evaluate.

Stage 3: Set standards. Customer service must be consistent throughout the company. For example, Marriott instructs all its hotel employees to smile and make eye contact when a customer walks up to the front desk. Employee working at computers are trained to stop and pay attention to customers. In many cases, even the most rushed customers will wait their turn if the person behind the counter acknowledges their presence with eye contact and a nod, or a simple greeting like, "Good afternoon, I'll be with you as soon as possible."

Stage 4: Educate your staff. Once you have a policy, make sure your employees are clear about what it entails. Give them whatever training and education they need to meet the policy's objectives.

Stage 5: Reward your team. Set up a system to recognize employees who act to improve service. Make sure they are rewarded for quality as well as quantity. For example, one firm paid employees a bonus based on the number of calls they handled. But a subsequent survey showed the most frequent winner also happened to be the person customers disliked the most. The employee was churning customers through the system but providing poor service. *Solution:* The reward criteria changed to include both the number and the quality of calls. You might also consider giving customers a way to give you feedback when your employee does an especially bad or especially good job, like an 800 number to call.

Stage 6: Keep in touch. Once your new policies are in place, send frequent questionnaires to your customers asking what they think of your service. Get feedback from your staff about how the policies are working for them and where they would like to see changes.

A solid service policy ensures that your customers will keep coming back and your sales will continue to grow.

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