

# Customer Service Is The Answer To Building A Better Business

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Whether you're an amusement game operator or a family entertainment center owner, there are certainly many ways to improve on the existing business formula. When analyzing a business on paper, there are a myriad of options, including reducing labor expenses, managing food costs, buying equipment at the lowest price available, and of course, maximizing guest spending by delivering exactly what they want. But these days, while most operators have already fine-tuned their operations, they still need another "edge" in the market. This is where customer service comes in. What really differentiates ourselves from each other? In a world of choices, what are the real reasons why a consumer chooses your organization?

## Customer Service - Don't Worry, It's Free

As we're all aware, it's the customer that ultimately paves the road to our success, but it's also the customer that can end our prosperity. Businesses that typically achieve high levels of success also seem to pay special attention to the customer, even when the chips are down. What's involved in providing a high level of customer service? Well, for starters, a business needs a trained staff that remains focused on one objective - creating a favorable experience for the customer. Many times I witness facility staff whose hearts are just not in the job of customer service. As a manager, it's important that your very best people be on the front line, as this is the line that 90% of your customers will reach. Inexperienced or low-energy staff members have great difficulty meeting a high customer service standard.

Training can be the key to enhancing your organization's customer service capabilities. Over the years, I've realized that some staff members were never exposed to customers in their previous career roles, and as such, are unsure how to react. This is where a continuous in-house training program comes in. Ask any employee in your operation and they'll say that their responses to specific events generally mirror the responses that they've heard from their managers. Unfortunately, sometimes managers provide responses in the security of their back-of-house office that was never intended for an actual customer. Essentially, the pressures of the day sometimes take precedent over the actual problem at hand, causing a manager to respond in a negative way to an employee inquiry. If the appropriate response is never identified, such as in a weekly training session, the employee now believes that the former comments are in fact management's position on the subject. The result is employees that now develop negative reactions toward customers, and actually view the customer as the "bad guy". Just imagine, the very customer that is paving the way to your success is viewed by the staff as a thorn in their side!

## Who Is A Customer?

No, this is not a trick question. But it is a question that can make us stop and think about who our customers are and what they expect from us. From my perspective, a customer is an individual that has come to us for something that we can provide - perhaps general entertainment, a birthday party for a son or daughter, or maybe a release from the stresses of modern day society. Whatever the need, the customer's goal always remains the same - to have an experience that meets their high standards for quality, value, and uniqueness. Delivering these three variables all at one time can truly be a challenge. Nonetheless, it is the customer that rates our abilities through their level of spending and frequency of visitation. I think it's fair to say that if someone provided you with a bag of gold nuggets worth thousands of dollars, you'd probably guard them with your life. Why then do many business owners fail to guard their customers the same way? Unlike other industries, ours is unique in that, generally, the profit margin on a customer is always 100%. Every dollar that a customer spends goes directly to satisfying our fixed costs or perhaps enhancing our profit. In reality, the light bill has to be paid whether a customer walks into the facility today or not. Each one of these customers is our bag of gold - how we treat them sets the standard for how big the bag is and how long it lasts.

It might be interesting to know that some of our biggest supporters are actually wrapped in the smallest packages. That's right, a four or five year old girl can oftentimes be the key catalyst in swaying an entire family to visit your facility. And a family of five can easily spend \$100 in a two hour period. With this in mind, her experience at your facility, as well as that of her mom, dad, and siblings, needs to be first rate. A great experience will almost always lead to another one.

## Training The Staff

Clients often ask which topics prove the most impactful at weekly training sessions. While every facility differs in terms of patron mix, entertainment selection, and price points, there are many topics that are common between facilities. By far, the most significant is problem solving. Many facilities employ prospering teens and young adults ranging in age from 16 to

23. These individuals may have the ambition, but not the tools, to carry your message through to the customer. Some have never been in a situation where an angry parent is demanding a firm solution from your staff member on the spot. Others view an angry guest's comments as a personal attack on themselves. It's important that this type of role playing be incorporated into your training sessions, so that all members of the team can witness the correct process for diffusing a guest. Once your team has the tools, they can be empowered to create the solutions, rather than always asking management for a solution, further delaying and infuriating the guest. In essence, all a frustrated guest really wants is for someone to listen and react. Training team members to listen is an important step, as offering a solution without listening to, and identifying with, a guest's concerns can be considered patronizing. At times, it may prove beneficial to actually encourage the guest to suggest a satisfactory solution to the problem. More times than not, I've found that the guest's solution is actually less impactful (in terms of expense) than the one that facility management might offer. This one action also helps to completely diffuse the guest's anger, as they have dictated the solution and, in turn, the facility has complied.

### **Service At A Premium**

As competition builds in many industries, we've seen large-scale retailers struggle to compete on price alone. Customer service, if it even exists, has hit an all-time low. That might work in the retail sector, where price is king, but in the entertainment industry, the quality of the experience and the people that provide it represent the only true measures. Especially now, when our world is in social conflict and our armed forces have been activated, guests might need an extra level of understanding, respect, and attention. Let's also consider these special times when assisting guests, knowing that a customer's personal challenges may far exceed our own. In turn, you'll likely find a level of loyalty and understanding from your patrons, all of whom are now members of your facility's extended family.

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