

# Everyone has a Customer to Serve!

Try these...  
Handy Activities for Student Success

An illustration of two hands shaking, symbolizing agreement or partnership. One hand is light blue and the other is dark blue. The hands are positioned in the center of the page, overlapping the text.

Linking the Classroom to Today's Workplace











# Customers are the Life-Blood of Every Business

## Ten Things to Remember About Customers

1. Customers are our reason for being.
2. Customers are feeling, thinking people- not cold statistics.
3. Customers are not nuisances or interruptions.
4. The customer's wish is our command.
5. Customers are our partners, not our competitors.
6. We are here to serve customers, not match wits with them.
7. Customers are doing us the favor, not vice versa.
8. Customers deserve the best we have to offer.
9. Customers don't need us-we need them.
10. Customers sign our paychecks.

Adapted from *Speaker's Library of Business Stories, Anecdotes and Humor*, by Joe Griffin

# 10 Handy Activities

-  **Defining Customer Service**  
**Remember Me?**
-  **Developing Interpersonal Skills**  
**Think Vertically**
-  **Experiencing the Cycle of Service**  
**Moments of Truth**
-  **Delivering Global Service**  
**It's A Small World**
-  **Managing Emotions**  
**Positive Vibes**
-  **Making a Difference**  
**Are You a Fred?**
-  **Voice Analysis**  
**Sound Advice**
-  **Problem Solving**  
**Smart Questions**
-  **Addressing Difficult Situations**  
**Keep Your Cool**
-  **Identifying Service Behaviors**  
**Secret Shopper Bingo**



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It is important to ask and answer this question:  
What do students need to know and be able  
to do “out there” as a result of their work in  
our classrooms?

”

— Ruth Stiehl, *The Outcomes Primer*



# Everyone has a Customer to Serve

We call them students, diners, guests, patients, bosses, parents, clients, readers, viewers...regardless of how we choose to label them—they are our customers. Yes, we are all in the customer service business, and at least a good part of our work involves directly or indirectly serving customers.

Our rapidly changing global economy has created a new breed of customers. Today's customers are more sophisticated and informed. They have more options and opportunities, more power, and more companies competing for their business. In addition, they are more pressed for time, more stressed, and hungrier for personal attention. To maintain our economic edge, we must improve and enhance the customer experience. We have to find new and better ways to extend and serve today's customers.

Our students, too, will have customers to serve. We need to make sure they recognize the importance of the customer and how to deliver a great customer service experience. To succeed, students must understand the elements of good service and the skills required to provide that service.

In the pages that follow, you will find 10 short, focused and creative activities to help you integrate customer service skills into your course work. These activities are designed so you can expand or shorten them and refine them to reflect and reinforce your course content. These lessons will help your students:

- ✓ Identify positive customer service behaviors.
- ✓ Analyze the customer service cycle.
- ✓ Practice positive customer service strategies.
- ✓ Apply these strategies in their personal and professional lives.

The booklet is arranged with information and directions for instructors on the left-hand page. On the right-hand page you will find a ready-to-use student activity sheet to copy, scan or download at [www.cccfcs.com](http://www.cccfcs.com). The activities do not necessarily need to go in any order, require no additional materials, and are designed to be active learning experiences. We encourage you to add a few of these to your course agenda. After all, ***everyone has a customer to serve!***



# Defining Customer Service

Developing and keeping customers is what business is all about. A business can have a great product, but without the right employees to interact with and serve customers, they might soon be out of business. Employers seek to hire employees with the good interpersonal skills required to work effectively with both internal and external customers.

According to the Small Business Administration, most businesses lose 15% of their customers because of product dissatisfaction. However, the greatest number of customers (67%) leave because of a poor customer service experience. Helping students understand and appreciate the importance of good customer service is critical to their success in the workplace.

One of the best ways to get your students thinking about customer service is to get them to reflect on their own customer service experiences and then discuss their responses.

## Customer Service

### Try this:

**Write** “Customer Service” on the board and ask students to define the term.

**Ask** some questions like:

*Can you describe the last time you received great service?*

*Can you tell us about a time you received really bad service?*

*Was it easier to come up with a good or bad experience? Why?*

**Distribute** *Remember Me?* Have students read the poem and respond to the questions.

**Review** their answers—especially questions 7 and 8. (See chart below.)

Have students share their definitions of good customer service. How are these definitions alike or different?

**Invite** students to explain how developing good customer service skills could help them succeed on their jobs.

## It Pay\$ to Please

Here are some recent statistics from the Academy for Educational Development that proves this point:

- ✓ We'll spend up to 10% more for the same product with better service.
- ✓ When we receive good service, we tell on the average 9 to 12 other people.
- ✓ When we receive poor service, we tell up to 20 people.
- ✓ 82% of customers will repurchase from a company if their complaint is handled quickly and pleasantly.
- ✓ If the service is really poor, 91% of retail customers won't go back to a store.
- ✓ It costs 5 times more money to attract a new customer than it does to keep an existing one.

insight





# Remember Me?

Read and reflect on this anonymous poem about personal customer service experiences. Then answer the question about each stanza. Finally, be prepared to share your description of good customer service.

## Remember Me?

*I'm the person who asks:  
"How long is the wait?"  
You tell me ten minutes...  
But it gets very late.*

*I'm the person who sees:  
The whole staff loiters  
While my waitress does everything  
But take my order.*

*I'm the person who says:  
"That's not what I ordered...  
but it's O.K.  
I'll eat it anyway."*

*I'm the person who calls:  
To see if my lost item was found  
And all I get is a  
run-around.*

*I'm the person who should:  
Write a negative letter  
But feel it wouldn't make  
Anything better.*

*Yes, you might say that I'm a good guy...  
That I understand that you kind of try.  
But, please read on and you will see...  
That there's another side of me.*

*I'm the person who  
Never comes back  
Because of something  
You tend to lack.*

*It amuses me to see you spending  
Thousands of dollars on ads never ending  
In an effort to get me back into your place  
When you don't even remember my face.*

*In order to keep me as a guest  
I have but one simple little request...  
When I am here all you have to do  
Is give me the service I'm entitled to.*

1. Have you ever experienced this problem?

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2. How does this make a customer feel?

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3. Can you tell about a time when you or someone you were with did this?

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4. What kind of response do you expect when you phone for information or to order something?

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5. When did you complain and what response did you get?

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6. How would you describe your attitude when you receive poor service?

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7. What percentage of unsatisfied customers leave?

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8. How much do you think it costs to get a new customer?

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9. How do you define good customer service?

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# Developing Interpersonal Skills

When we talk about customers we mean anyone internal or external who is affected by a business' products or services. There are generally two distinct, but equally important, kinds of customers—internal customers and external customers. Internal customers include those in the distribution channel who help deliver a service or product. On the other hand, external customers are those who directly purchase the products or services of a business enterprise. Because good customer service involves meeting both the needs of the internal and external customers, students need to know how to effectively work with both audiences.

## Try this:

Ask students to **explain** the **difference** between an external and internal customer.

**Offer** an example of your college:

*External Customers* – students, parents, businesses...

*Internal Customers* – administrators, teachers, counselors, staff...

**Ask** students: *Why is taking care of internal customers just as important as taking care of external customers?*

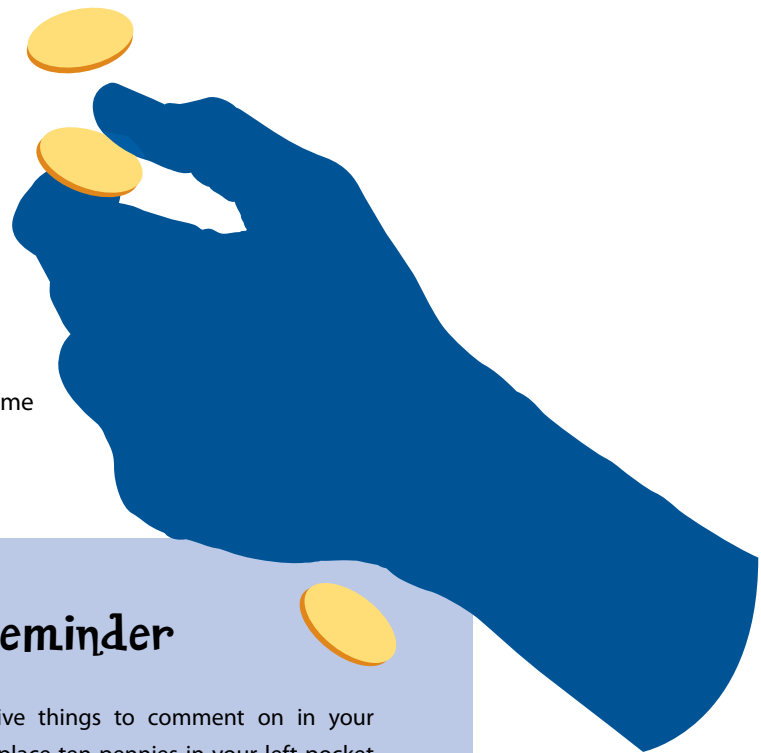
**Write** the word instructor, vertically, on the white board.

**Ask** students for adjectives that describe qualities of a “good” instructor — attributes that help him/her serve both internal and external customers.

K I ND  
I N TERESTING  
GOOD LI S TENER  
T ECHIE  
WELL P R EPARED  
THO U GHTFUL  
AC C OUNTABLE  
T IMELY  
KN O WLEDGEABLE  
FAI R

**Distribute** *Think Vertically* and have students complete the same kind of activity using the word SERVICE.

**Assess** the number of different descriptive words used.



## Try the 10 Penny Reminder

Develop a habit of looking for positive things to comment on in your workplace. First thing in the morning, place ten pennies in your left pocket and then discreetly move them one-at-a-time into your right pocket, but only after you've said something positive... “Hey Ben, great looking shirt!” (Move one penny.) ...“Anna, you really did a great job answering the client’s question.” (Move another). After a few weeks, you won’t need the pennies anymore, as you’ll be in the daily habit of looking for the best in others and positively remarking about it.

— Eric Chester, *Generation Why.Com*







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# Think Vertically

Using the letters in the word SERVICE, write adjectives, horizontally, that describe the way you treat other people at work. Use words that define your service attitude toward both your internal and external customers. The vertical letters may fall anywhere in the crossing terms.

	S	
	E	
	R	
	V	
	I	
	C	
	E	

Circle the words in your chart that are your greatest strengths and be prepared to explain how these qualities help you serve customers.

# Experiencing the Cycle of Service

Each time a customer comes in contact with a business or a representative of the business these interactions are dubbed *moments of truth* (MOT). When you string all these contact points together you have the **cycle of service**. By and large most of the MOT we encounter are satisfactory. However, sometimes great things happen that exceed our expectations and the moment becomes a *moment of magic*. From time to time, we encounter a disastrous experience—a *moment of misery*.

When students have an opportunity to analyze the cycle of service and identify the moments of truth they will have a better understanding of the broader definition of the customer experience.

## Try this:

Ask students to **describe** a customer experience at a Starbucks Café.

*What happens first, next and so on?*

*List the steps, as they call them out, on the board.*

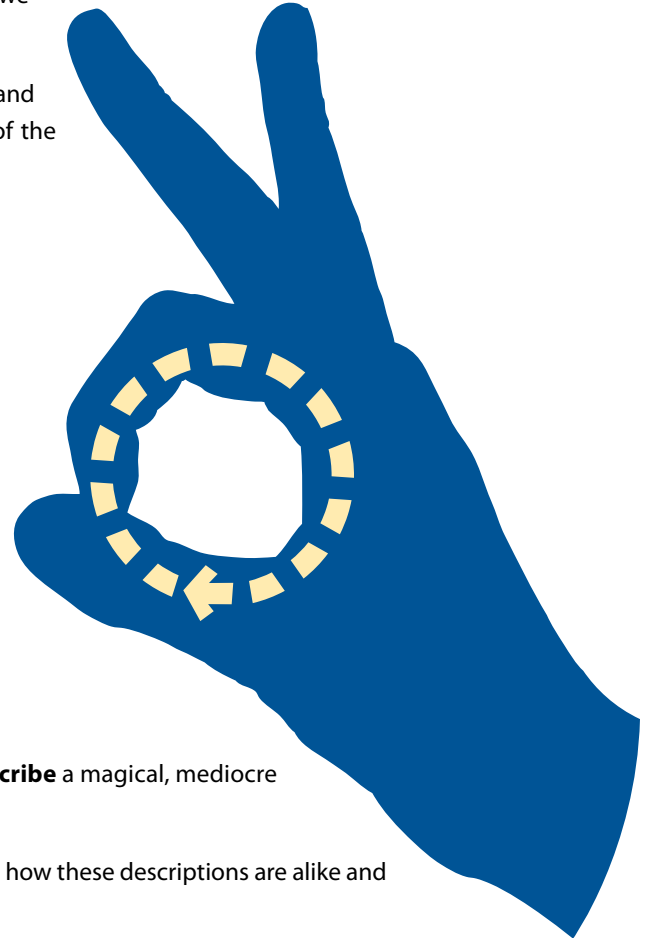
**Explain** these steps are MOT. When these MOT are all strung together, they add up to the cycle of service.

**Distribute** the *Moment of Truth* activity sheet.

Have students **divide** into groups with 3 to 5 members.

Have them **review** the cycle of service steps and work together to **describe** a magical, mediocre or miserable MOT.

**Call on** different students to read random MOT descriptions and discuss how these descriptions are alike and different.



## MOT Compound

“Last year, each of our 10 million customers came in contact with approximately five Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) employees, and this contact lasted an average of 15 seconds each time. Those 50 million ‘moments of truth’ are the moments that ultimately will determine whether SAS will succeed or fail as a company.”

— Jan Carlzon, *Moments of Truth*





# Moments of Truth

Each time a customer has contact with a business it is defined as a moment of truth (MOT). A customer experiences many moments of truth during the service cycle. In the example below, assume you've decided to go to a movie. The 10 steps listed give the cycle of service from beginning to end. Work with a small group of students and together describe what it would take at each service step to make the contact exceed, meet, or fall short of your expectations.

## Going to the Movies: Cycle of Service

Moment of Truth	Moment of Magic Exceed Expectation	Moment of Mediocrity Meet Expectation	Moment of Misery Fail to Meet Expectation
1. Find a parking space	Clean, ample, roomy parking spaces close to theater. An alert security guard on the lot.	Find a space not too close nor too far from theater.	Parking lot full and you have to park across street
2. Wait in line to buy ticket			
3. Buy ticket			
4. Enter theater			
5. Buy popcorn/soda			
6. Pay for refreshments			
7. Use the restroom			
8. Find a seat			
9. Sit and watch movie			
10. Leave theater go to car			

Share a recent moment of magic or a moment of misery. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Delivering Global Service

“The single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture,” said anthropologist and author Edward Hall. As the world continues to shrink, students will undoubtedly be interacting with and serving people from different countries and different cultures. The better they understand how people from around the world want and expect to be served, the better prepared they will be to effectively navigate in a multicultural environment. In this activity, students review, reflect, and interpret ten proverbs to uncover some universal truths about customer service.

## Try this:

**Introduce** proverbs to your class.

*In each country, proverbs provide insights into simple truths and beliefs of the people. They convey cultural knowledge, wisdom and insight into the customs and values of cultures. Proverbs are used to support arguments, to provide lessons and instruction, and to stress shared values.*

**Provide** students some examples of proverbs and ask them how they interpret them.

*Look before you leap.*

*All's well that ends well.*

*Where there's a will there's a way.*

**Distribute** *It's a Small World* and give students a few minutes to write their responses.

**Form** groups with 3-5 students who share a birthday in the same season—winter, spring, summer, fall.

Ask students to **share** their interpretations with their respective groups.

Come back together as a class to ask a few questions about **how** and **why** this information is useful.



## Mind Your Distance

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“Proxemics is the study of the rules in a culture about personal space. In the U.S. personal distance, which is the space between colleagues during a normal conversation, is usually about 20 to 36 inches. If the person is not well known to us, we will stand from 2 to 4 feet away during a conversation. Knowing where we stand, and where to stand, is important when dealing with people from different cultures.”

— Judie Haynes, *Proxemics and the U.S. Culture*





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# It's a Small World

In each country proverbs are popular sayings that contain advice or state a generally accepted truth. Proverbs are big ideas in tiny packages. Read and reflect on these 10 proverbs from around the world. Interpret how these proverbs might apply to a customer service situation.

1. If speaking is silver, then listening is gold. *Turkish Proverb*

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2. A handful of patience is worth a bushel of brains. *Dutch Proverb*

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3. Once you build a bad/good reputation it stays forever. *Spanish Proverb*

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4. It's not shameful not to know but it's shameful not to ask. *Azerbaijani Proverb*

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5. A man without a smiling face must not open shop. *Chinese Proverb*

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6. People count up the faults of those who keep them waiting. *French Proverb*

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7. There is no shame in not knowing: the shame lies in not finding out. *Russian Proverb*

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8. To a quick question give a slow answer. *Italian Proverb*

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9. The mouth is the cause of calamity. *Japanese Proverb*

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10. One falsehood spoils a thousand truths. *African Proverb*

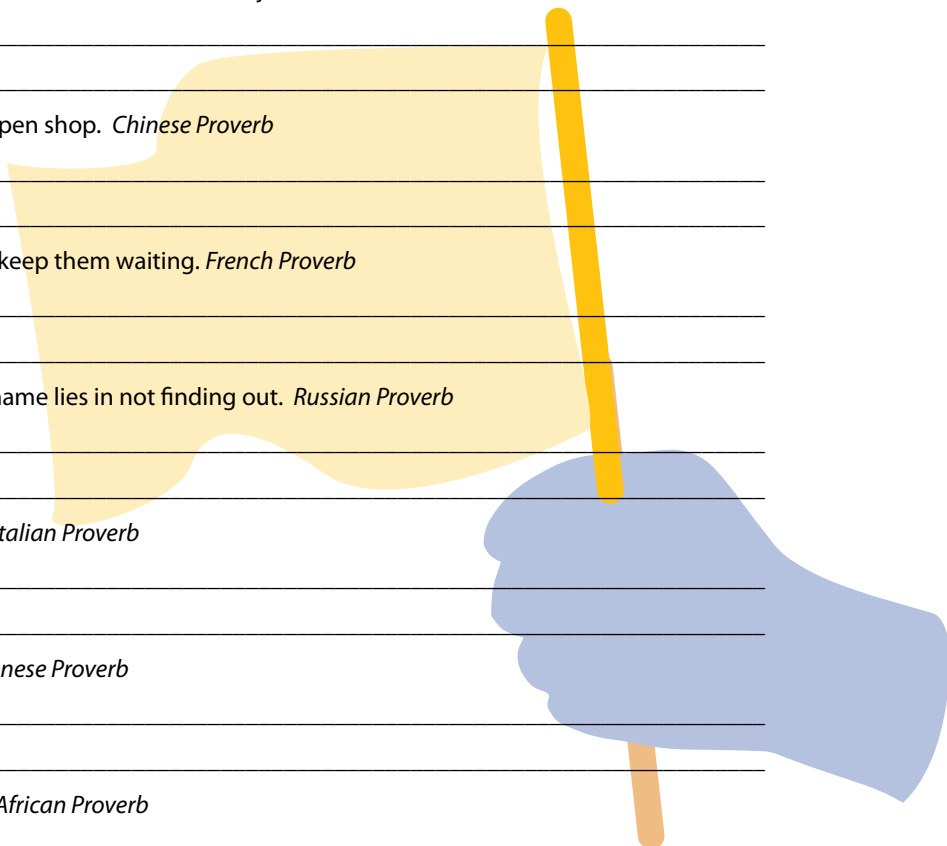
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Which one is your favorite? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think good customer service is a universal value? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Managing Emotions

“We’re walking mood inductors, passing our own moods on to others, who in turn pass them on to people they encounter,” says Sigal Barsade, Professor at Wharton Business School. Emotions are contagious and when we interact with people in a good mood, the mood spreads to others. Conversely, when people are sad or depressed, these emotions also quickly spread. When we are able to manage our emotions and maintain an optimistic attitude we benefit from it, and we have a more positive influence on the behavior of those around us. As students become more aware of their emotions and how to manage them effectively, they become better service providers.

## Try this:

**Ask** students some questions:

*When your family members are cheerful in the morning, how does that influence your day?*

*If members of your work team are negative and depressed, how does this impact your work?*

*When a sales person complains to you about a problem, how does that affect your buying?*

**Explain** that research has shown that emotions are contagious and whether we know it or not, we spread our emotions to those around us.

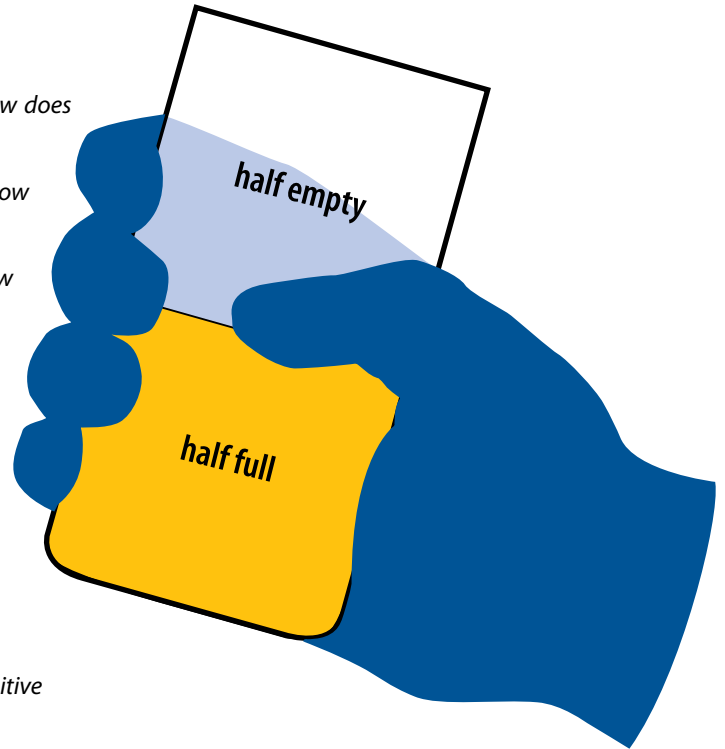
**Distribute** *Positive Vibes* and do the first question together.

Have students **complete** the rest of the exercise and then **discuss** their responses.

Get **more input** from students by asking:

*What is one thing you will do today to spread more positive emotions to others?*

*What can you do to be less susceptible to others' bad moods?*



## Why is Optimism so Valuable?

“An attitude of positive expectancy energizes us and calls out our potential. It heightens our awareness of opportunity. Optimism points a powerful beam of light into the darker corners of our lives, revealing possibilities that are hiding in the shadows. The positive-minded person interprets events from the angle of hope, finding benefits and creative solutions the pessimist overlooks.”

— Price Pritchett, *Hard Optimism*





# Positive Vibes

Emotions are contagious and good and bad moods quickly spread from one person to another. Unfortunately, while we send and receive emotional cues from others, we are not usually aware of these influences. Understanding your own emotions and how they influence your behavior is an important piece of information that will help you understand more about how to deliver effective customer service. Complete the exercise below to help you “tune into” and reflect on the impact of emotions.

Experience	Impact on You	Impact on Others
When you phone a business and the person who answers the phone greets you with a cheerful welcome, how does that make you feel?	How did it affect your mood?	How do you think others respond to a positive greeting?
Think about a time you felt challenged and enthusiastic at work. Why did you feel this way?	How did these feelings influence your behavior?	What signs might have been visible to others?
When you have to deal with an angry customer how do you handle it?	How do you keep from catching the customer's anger?	What signs might have been visible to others?
Think about a time when your boss was in a bad mood. Explain the situation.	Did your boss's mood impact you?	How did the boss's bad mood impact those around you?
When you are around someone at work who is in a very good mood, how does it make you feel?	How does it influence your behavior?	If other people are around, how does it knowingly or unknowingly affect their behavior?

# Making a Difference

Mark Sanborn, in his book *The Fred Factor*, writes about the postal carrier who delivered his mail for over ten years—a guy named Fred. Sanborn, a motivational speaker and author, was a frequent traveler and Fred went above and beyond to take care of Sanborn's mail and "to keep an eye" on his home. Fred extended his special care and services to everyone on his route. Fred did his very ordinary job in extraordinary ways by getting to know his customers and their needs. Sanborn believes everyone has an opportunity to make a difference in the world by following Fred's example.

## Try this:

**Tell** students about Fred, the postman, and how he made a difference.

**Ask** students to tell about any Freds they have come across.

**Distribute** *Are You a Fred?*

**Review** the four principals, outlined on the sheet, that made Fred special. Give students 5 minutes to **read and fill in** their responses for each principle.

Have students form a **concentric circle**.

*Have them count off one, two, one, two...*

*The "ones" form an outside circle facing in, while the "twos" form an inside circle facing out.*

**Explain** that the purpose of the activity is to share information with a number of different students.

Tell them **you** will be asking \*4 questions after which **each person in the pair will have 1 minute to respond**.

*Tell participants that you will signal when one minute is up by calling "Change!" This means to change roles...not change partners. After both parties have given their responses (2 minutes) instruct the outer circle to move one person to the left. The inner circle does not move. In this way, new pairs are formed to listen and respond to each question.*

**Ask** some questions about the activity: *What is one thing you learned...*

**Suggest** that you and your students do one thing special for someone different each day.

**Agree** to report on the results at the next class.

**\* Suggestions for the 4 Questions for the Concentric Circle**

*What are two ways you make a difference in people's lives?*

*What do you do to develop good relationships with people?*

*How do you or how will you create value for your customers?*

*How do you keep yourself energized and enthusiastic about work?*



## Do One a Day...

"Commit yourself to performing one 10 minute act of exceptional customer service each day and induce your colleagues to do the same. In a 100 person outfit, taking into account normal vacations, holidays...that would mean 24,000 new courteous acts per year. Such is the stuff of revolutions."

— Tom Peters, *In Search of Excellence*





# Are You a Fred?

Mark Sanborn in his book, *The Fred Factor*, tells the true story of Fred, a postal carrier, who made a remarkable difference in the lives of the people on his postal route. Fred did his job so well that he made his customers happy and himself happy too. Here are the four principles that made Fred so special.

## 1. Everyone makes a difference.

Fred, a postal carrier on a regular residential route in a city in Colorado, made the people he served feel important. Fred did what he could to take care of his customers. Through his small acts of caring, he made a difference in people's lives. What are three examples of small things you do to help others?

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## 2. Everything is built on relationships.

Indifferent people deliver impersonal service. Service becomes personalized when you get to know the people who work around you, your internal customers and your external customers. How do you develop relationships with people?

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## 3. You must continually create value for others, and it doesn't have to cost a penny.

Think about Fred. He had a drab blue uniform and a bag. Fred walked up and down streets with that bag full of mail, and his heart and head full of imagination. Fred's imagination enabled him to create ideas of how to serve his customers better. What is one way you could create value for your customers without spending money?

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## 4. You can reinvent yourself regularly.

Most people think Fred had a very boring job. But Fred was always thinking about how to do his work better—how to serve his customers more effectively. Fred did his job with such energy, enthusiasm, and intelligence that he had a book written about him. How do you keep yourself energized and enthusiastic about your work?

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# Voice Analysis

How we say things conveys more meaning than what we say. In fact, 55% of our message is conveyed non-verbally, through our facial expressions and body language. Voice quality accounts for about 38% of the meaning of a message, while the words themselves make up just 7%.

Our voice is a reflection of what is going on inside of us. A nice, pleasant and magnetic voice can help people build more positive connections with their customers while a whining or complaining tone annoys and irritates them. Even the most thoughtful words are of little value if spoken in a monotone. If students take time to analyze and improve their voice quality, they will have yet another key to help them relate more successfully to others.

## Try this:

**Ask** students what they like about their voice?

*What qualities go into making a pleasant sounding voice?*

*How important is voice quality when talking to others?*

*What kind of voice qualities do you like to hear?*

**Explain** that a person's voice actually conveys 38% of the message.

**Write** these Vocal Qualities:

- **Tone** expresses your feeling or emotion.
- **Pitch** is how high or deep your voice sounds.
- **Rate** is how many words you speak in a minute.
- **Volume** is how loud or soft you speak.

**Distribute** *Sound Advice*.

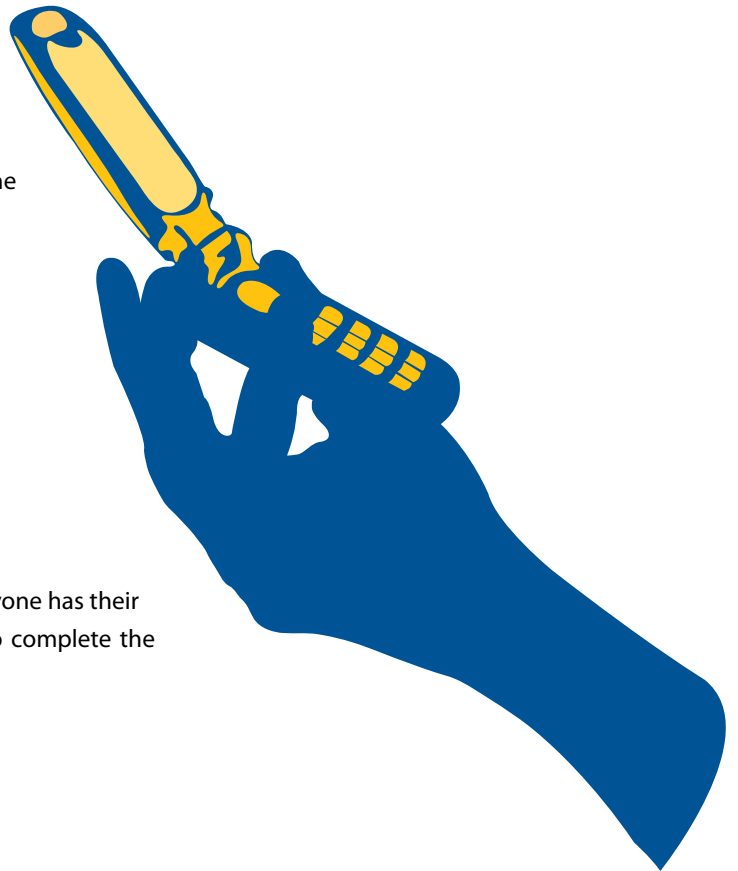
**Review** the instructions.

You can use this activity as a homework assignment or if everyone has their cell phones in class, allow them to disperse for 5 minutes to complete the assignment.

Ask students to **share** the answers to the questions.

*What will you do to improve your voice?*

*How will a better voice quality benefit you?*



## Smile

Smile when you answer the phone and you will immediately sound 90% warmer. People can hear the friendly difference in a smiling voice on the other end of the line. To prove this to yourself, look in the mirror and scowl and at the same time leave a message for yourself on your cell phone. Then call yourself back, this time leave the same message with a smiling face. Compare what you hear.





# Sound Advice

Psychologists and physicians are trained to listen not only to words, but to a person’s voice. The voice is a reflection of what is going on inside of us! Do you know how you sound to others? Read the script below (about 1 minute) into the voice mail on your phone. Then listen to yourself and rate how you sound. You may need to listen several times to hear and rate yourself on all the different qualities.

## Voice Evaluation Script

*Many people think that communicating effectively is merely a matter of finding and using the right magic words. They believe that using certain words in the right order, will get them the results they want.*

*Unfortunately, these people are living in a dream world. Scientific research tells us that attempting to persuade by words alone is about as effective as trying to chop down a tree with a Swiss Army knife.*

*In a study conducted at UCLA, Dr. Albert Mehrabian found that when verbal, vocal and visual signals are inconsistent, content counts for a mere seven percent of the overall message. Most of our message—about 55 percent—is sent by facial expressions and body language; but 38 percent depends on the quality of our voices—pitch, tone, volume, and inflection.*

*The implications of this are shocking. If anything about your voice is flat or distracting, annoying or boring, you could be reducing your effectiveness by 38 percent!*

This passage was excerpted from *Speak to Influence: How to Unlock the Hidden Power of Your Voice* by Susan Berkley.

## Rate Your Sound

(1 to 5)

<b>Sad</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Happy</b>
<b>Nasal</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Non-Nasal</b>
<b>Slow</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Fast</b>
<b>Soft</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Loud</b>
<b>Whiney</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
<b>Shrill(High)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Deep</b>
<b>Monotonous</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Dramatic</b>
<b>Lethargic</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Energetic</b>
<b>Insincere</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Sincere</b>

What is one quality you will change today to improve your sound? \_\_\_\_\_

# Problem Solving

Delivering great service is all about solving customers' problems. If you can't put your finger on your customer's problem, you won't be able to solve it. Asking questions is one of the best strategies to help you gather information needed to solve problems. There are several different types of questions you can use when trying to understand the needs and concerns of a client—they are open- and close-ended questions.

Open-ended questions usually begin with *how*, *what*, and *why*. These kind of questions give the big picture. Close-ended questions, on the other hand, usually begin with *when*, *where*, and *who* and give specific details. Give your students an opportunity to hone their ability to ask questions by playing the *Smart Question Game*, an activity adapted from Skip Downing's *On Course Workshops*.



bad  
questions

## Try this:

**Write** the term customer service on the board or overhead.

**Explain** that customer service is all about solving problems for customers. *In order to do that, you need to be a good detective and to ask good questions to gather clues to help solve the problem.*

**Tell** students that you will go around the room and each person is to ask a question about the topic—customer service. Any question is acceptable as long as it is about the topic and has not been asked before.

**Distribute** the *Smart Questions Game*.

**Ask** students to record each question on their *Smart Questions* worksheet. Explain the game will continue until the "next" student is unable to offer a new question.

After students have **created** a long list of questions, quiz students about the importance of asking questions:

*Why is it important to learn to ask questions?*

*What was one question asked that made you think?*

*What do you need to do to improve your ability to ask questions?*

## Ask the Right Questions — Solve the Right Problem

"I'm not returning until you fix it," bandleader Count Basie told a club owner whose piano was always out of tune. A month later Basie got a call from the club owner that the piano was fixed. When Basie returned the piano was still out of tune. Basie confronted the club owner. "You said you fixed the piano," an irate Basie shouted. "I did," came the reply. "I had it painted." Before you begin solving a problem, ask the right questions to solve the right problem.

— Roger von Oech, *A Creative Whack on the Head*



insight



# Addressing Difficult Situations

One of the greatest challenges when working with others is to manage difficult people and situations with grace and professionalism. The most important thing to do in a difficult situation is to remain calm. When you are able to stay calm and not react in a hostile manner, you are helping to deescalate the situation.

If customers see you as making a genuine effort on their behalf, they are more likely to calm down and give you an opportunity to effectively resolve the problem. Giving students the tools to deal with difficult situations and an opportunity to practice is invaluable.

## Try this:

**Ask** students to describe a time they were upset about a product or service and complained.

**Ask** what kind of response they got. How could the response have been better?

**Explain** that angry or upset people generally want three things:

*They want help: Listen and ask questions to try and solve the problem.*

*They want choices: Whenever possible offer choices to make them feel less helpless.*

*They want acknowledgement: Empathize with their situation.*

**Distribute** the *Keep Your Cool* worksheet.

**Form groups** with three to five students and have them complete the role play.

**Discuss** the different ways students approached each situation.

**Ask** students: *What is one thing you learned from this exercise that you can use immediately?*



## Use the First 30 Seconds

“When you first encounter a customer, a good relationship with him or her is almost always less than thirty seconds away...you can practically ensure this good relationship just by making simple changes in three specific areas: your opening greeting, your first response, and your ability to actively listen to people.”

— Richard S. Gallagher, *Great Customer Connections*





In your group, discuss each of the five statements from dissatisfied customers. Would you serve the customer by offering help, giving them choices, and/or acknowledging their situation and their feelings? Role-play each situation with one person in your group being the customer and the other the sales representative. Then discuss how each situation was handled and the outcomes.

## Statements from Dissatisfied Customers

1. You said this food didn't have any dairy products in it. Look, right there I see cheese!

2. Yesterday James told me that Robert hit him when he was on the playground and that when he told the teacher she did not do anything.

3. I thought you said that the designs for the new product would be ready two days ago... I still have not received them.

4. The doctor said Carlos had gained too much weight. I don't think he is getting healthy food here.

5. I got this letter from your company but the print is so small I can't read it. Are you trying to hide information from me?

6. I paid for first class accommodations. My room is dirty and noisy. I want to talk to the manager.

# Identifying Service Behaviors

Marketing companies send anonymous shoppers into stores, restaurants and online to 'act' as customers and to report on the service responses they receive. These Secret Shoppers' evaluations then help organizations assess and improve their customer service.

While you are probably not an official secret shopper, you have experienced many positive, neutral and negative shopping experiences. In this activity, you will find out what kinds of experiences your students have had and get some of their ideas for improving service.

## Try this:

**Ask** students what they know about Secret Shoppers.

*What do Secret Shoppers do?*

*Why would Secret Shoppers help a business?*

*Where would you like to be a Secret Shopper?*

**Distribute** Secret Shopper Bingo.

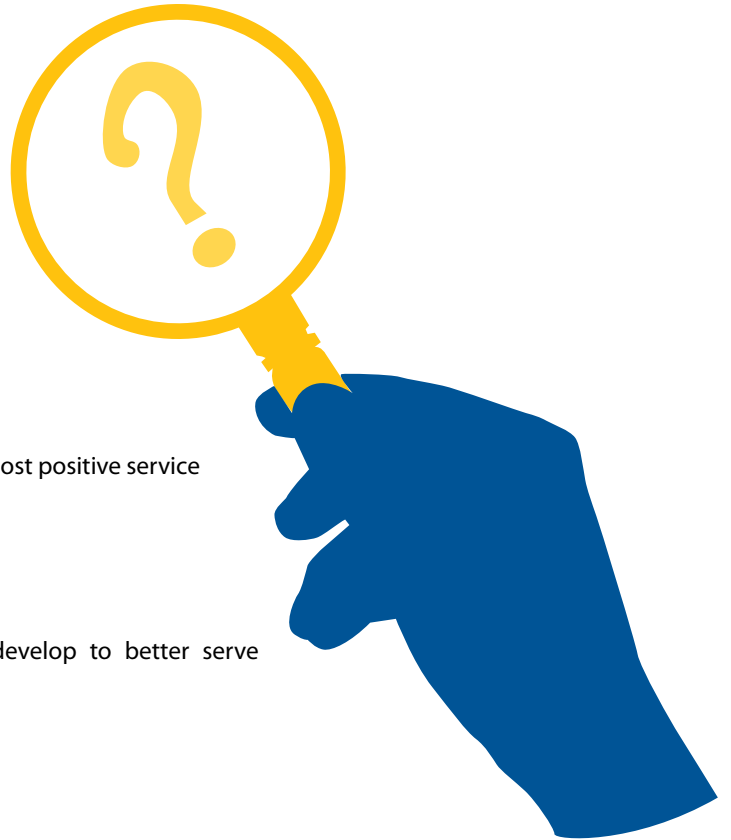
**Give students** about 5-10 minutes to complete the activity.

Come back together and **identify** the businesses with the most positive service experiences.

**Ask** students what is most important to them as a customer.

**Write** down responses.

**Ask** students what quality or skill they would like to develop to better serve customers.



## Instead of...

### Avoid:

I don't know.

No.

That's not my job.

That's not my fault.

You want it by when?

Calm down.

I'm busy right now.

Call me back.

### Replace with:

*I will find out.*

*What I can do is...*

*This is who can help you...*

*Let's see what we can do about it.*

*I'll try my best.*

*I am sorry for the inconvenience.*

*I will be with you in just a moment.*

*I will call you back.*

insight





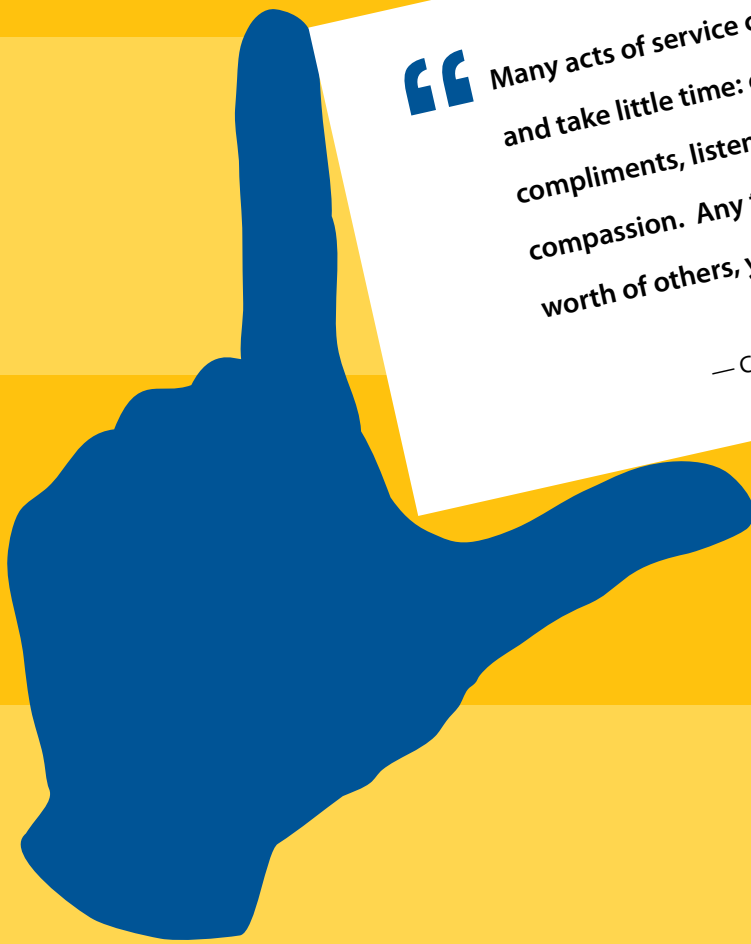


#10

# Secret Shopper Bingo

To find out more about good and bad customer service experiences talk to your classmates. Walk around the classroom and find someone who has experienced and can explain one of these customer service situations. Put the name of the business where the person experienced good/bad service in the box. Try to win BINGO by filling the boxes going across, down or on the diagonal. Better yet, win Super BINGO by entering a name in each box.

<b>B</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>O</b>
Service people were nowhere to be found _____	A service person who smiled and looked genuinely interested in customers _____	A service person available but was rude, rushed or indifferent _____	A service person who ran not walked to do a price check _____	A service person who provided misinformation _____
A service person who quickly took care of your order _____	A service person who answered a phone call in the middle of your transaction _____	A service person who listened and asked questions _____	A service person who quickly fixed a problem _____	A service person who was unable to solve a small problem _____
A service person who embarrassed a customer _____	A service person who answered the phone cheerfully _____	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	A service person who complained to you about his/her job _____	A service person who responded calmly when a customer was upset _____
A service person who promptly returned your phone call _____	A service person who was tired _____	A service person who complicated a transaction _____	An energetic service person _____	A service person who made you feel important _____
A service person who talked with friends while you waited _____	A happy service person _____	An on-line service person who updated you on your order _____	An untrained service person who could not handle the transaction _____	A service person who was dressed inappropriately _____



“ Many acts of service cost nothing and take little time: encouragement, compliments, listening, gratitude, and compassion. Any time you affirm the worth of others, you *serve*. ”

— Chris Karcher, Relationships of Grace



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