The 5 Principles of Customer Care

Overview

Most companies are looking to improve customer satisfaction in today’s tightly competitive marketplace. When customers give your company a 5, on a 1 to 5 scale, they are six times more likely to purchase from you again than those who give you a score of 4.8! Customers are the lifeblood of organizations, and their satisfaction is closely linked to retention, the positive word of mouth that attracts new customers, and repeat business. Satisfying customers requires quick resolution of their issues, which is easier said than done. Minimally, customers expect to be listened to, taken seriously, understood, treated respectfully, and they expect to receive timely action. Earning top Net Promoter scores or 5s on a CSAT survey requires attention to detail.

In this eBook, we’ll explore some core principles of customer care that drive strong customer satisfaction scores. Of course there are essential skills that should always be demonstrated by customer facing employees, and MHI Global has a lot of information to offer you in that arena. For now, let’s focus on five key principles that are relevant to anyone who manages or trains a customer service team.

Introduction

The following principles are a result of our work performed with numerous organizations to assist them in establishing cultures of world-class service. The principles discussed here are key to that endeavor—regardless of industry. It’s difficult to pare it down to only five principles—certainly there are many more to be considered—but this provides a good starting point for anyone looking to build and maintain a strong customer care culture within their own organization.

Customer Care Defined

The concept of “customer care” needs to be distinguished from “skills.”

There are some essential skills that should be demonstrated by anyone in a frontline customer care position, and MHI Global certainly has a lot of information to offer you in that arena. For now, let’s focus on some key principles that are relevant to anyone who manages or trains a customer care team, as well as to the customer care representatives themselves. After each principle, we’ll highlight some relevant questions to reflect upon. The goal is to help you assess whether this principle is being put into practice within your
Customer Care Principle #1

The first principle is centered on your customers and how they regard frontline employees as representatives of your company. Customers rarely know or see what goes on behind the scenes, and their impression of your organization stems from what we call “customer touchpoints.” These customer touchpoints happen every time a customer comes into contact with your company and uses that experience to form an impression of your organization. Frontline employees, whether they’re communicating face-to-face, on the telephone, or via live chat or e-mail, are in direct and constant communication with your customers. Investing in the skills and knowledge of these employees is also investing in the customer experience. Ensuring that these customer touchpoints are leaving a favorable impression, some questions to consider include:

- Do frontline employees view themselves as ambassadors of the organization?
- Are they trained in communication skills?
- Are they empowered to do the needful (within reason) for customers?
- Are you aware of the various customer touchpoints that occur in your organization?
Customer Care Principle #2

Studies have shown a direct correlation between employees’ job satisfaction and the quality of customer service those employees provide. [Really no surprise there.] Customer care—whether that means selling lawnmowers or fixing servers—is an intrinsically rewarding profession. Simply put, it feels good to be of service to someone and be a bright spot in a person’s day. When employees are encouraged to develop this attitude, a strong culture of customer care is created. Customer care is a two-sided coin and doesn’t typically happen unless the employees themselves feel valued by their company and satisfied with their jobs. It may seem obvious, but it’s worth noting: if employees aren’t satisfied on the job, they won’t be motivated to demonstrate a high level of customer care. At best, they’ll do just enough to get by, but little more. The following are some key questions to ask yourself about employee satisfaction at your organization:

• What is the turnover rate for your customer-facing employees?
• How do you measure employee satisfaction and motivation?
• When employee satisfaction is low, what do you do about it?
• Do performance issues in your organization stem from an employee’s attitude or from his or her skill level?

Your answers to these questions will tell you what’s needed in order to build a culture of strong customer care.
Customer Care Principle #3

The third key principle of customer care is demonstrating to customers that they’re valued by your company. Many organizations falsely assume that customers already know this. The only way to ensure that customers know they’re valued is to take care of their needs or requests in a timely, efficient, and correct manner. At each and every customer touchpoint, maintain a mindset of earning the trust and business of customers. Never take it for granted.

Customers’ needs often extend beyond the transaction. They want to feel appreciated and respected. They want to know that your company’s customer care philosophy is just that: Care. Don’t mince words, tell them directly. Tell the customer that their business is appreciated before ending a call or a face-to-face visit. This simple statement can go a long way. Here are three questions to keep in mind:

- If you were a customer of your organization, would you feel valued?
- When closing a call or other type of customer transaction, are employees expected to thank customers for their business?
- Do customer-facing employees understand the importance of earning a customer’s trust and loyalty on an ongoing basis?

The good news is putting this principle into action is usually a straightforward and simple step.
Customer Care Principle #4

It is not uncommon for companies to place a strong emphasis on external customer care while losing sight of the fact that internal customers matter just as much. Why? Often, somewhere down the line the service you provide to an internal customer will show up in an external customer transaction. An internal customer is any employee who depends on the timing, quality, and accuracy of your work in order for them to succeed in their own work. Those organizations in which a customer care culture is truly embedded do not make distinctions about internal and external care. Each employee’s mission is simply to demonstrate excellence with each and every task. To help you assess the level of internal customer service in your organization, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do your employees know who their internal customers are?
- Are employees measured on the service they provide to internal customers?
- Do they recognize that everyone in the organization is a service provider?
- If you feel that you might need work in any of these areas, the next principle can help.
Customer Care Principle #5

You cannot expect employees to meet your expectations until you’ve provided them the knowledge and skills to do so. If you’re serious about embracing a culture of customer care, you need to educate employees as to what this expectation looks like on the job. It shouldn’t be assumed that employees know what goes into providing good customer service—internal or external. They may have some good instincts and may take certain measures that they feel exemplifies providing good service, but this in no way guarantees consistent customer care is delivered. Training employees in your company’s customer care philosophy and their job-specific service skills is a crucial and important step. Once employees have been trained, it’s essential to hold them accountable for putting their learned skills into practice on the job. This, of course, requires strong and consistent coaching on an ongoing basis. Finally, once you’ve sufficiently trained employees and held them accountable for putting their training into practice, make sure they are rewarded for their success.
Formula for Success

Here at MHI Global, we believe that strong performance in the area of customer care is represented by a simple formula:

**Training + Coaching = Success**

The following questions will help you assess where you stand in those two disciplines:

- Do employees know what’s expected of them?
- Do they have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to provide great service to internal and external customers?
- Do supervisors and managers provide regular, constructive, and skilled coaching to employees?
- Are employees rewarded for their success?
- If your answer to any of these questions is no, it’s time to take a look at your training and coaching and possibly move them up the priority list.

Summary

To summarize, the five customer care principles discussed are:

**Principle #1:** To customers, frontline employees are the company.

**Principle #2:** Employee satisfaction matters!

**Principle #3:** Show customers they’re valued. Don’t assume they know it.

**Principle #4:** Internal customer care is as important as external customer care.

**Principle #5:** Train your staff to deliver great service—and hold them accountable.

If you’d like more information on strengthening the level of customer care offered by your organization, please give us a call at 877-678-3380. We’ll be happy to help.

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About MHI Global

MHI Global works with organizations across all verticals around the world to build and sustain customer-focused, high-performance enterprises that can drive profitable, predictable top-line growth. We work with our clients by sharing our vision and expertise on how to more effectively engage with customers. Dedicated to customer management excellence, our unrivaled capabilities come from the combined expertise of powerhouse brands that make up MHI Global: AchieveGlobal, Channel Enablers, Huthwaite, Impact Learning Systems and Miller Heiman. To learn more, visit our website, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Google+.