



# **BARE KNUCKLE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**HOW TO DELIVER A KNOCKOUT CUSTOMER  
EXPERIENCE & HAMMER THE COMPETITION**

**SIMON HAZELDINE & CHRIS NORTON**

LEANMARKETING™  
★ P R E S S ★

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*To Ines and Lara... for giving me love, time and inspiration.*

CHRIS NORTON

*To KP and TJ as always. I love you.*

SIMON HAZELDINE

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# Preface

*"Customer service has never been worse.  
I'm still sort of amazed at how bad things are.  
If I go in a restaurant and the food even  
shows up, I have a party!"*

LARRY WINGET

PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER, TELEVISION CELEBRITY, AUTHOR

## **If Your Customers Are So Important To You, Why Is Your Customer Service So Bad?**

As you have come to expect from the "Bare Knuckle" series of books, it is time to face the brutal facts. Watch out - it is going to get ugly!

Every year thousands of companies go out of business. They don't manage to make enough profit to survive and they go to the wall. People lose their jobs and the business owners often lose huge sums of money.

Every year companies spend small fortunes trying to attract new customers to make up for the ones they have lost to their competitors. Finding new customers is expensive. Very expensive.

Every year millions of customers take their business (and their money!) to another company because they get poor customer service. They go and spend their money with someone else because the company (in fact the people in the company) doesn't keep its promises and doesn't resolve problems efficiently or effectively. Customers walk because staff and managers treat them with indifference. They spend their money elsewhere because they don't feel cared for, because their needs have been ignored, because they're tired of being passed from department to department and because the company failed to realise that they exist to serve their customers.

Every year companies make it incredibly difficult for people to carry on spending money with them. At the risk of stating the blindingly obvious - if you are in business then one of your key objectives is to facilitate the transfer of money from your customer's bank account to your own bank account as quickly as possible!

If this is the case then why do so many companies appear to almost be working to prevent the transfer of money from happening? We once saw a humorous poster that said, "If we don't take care of the customer maybe they'll stop bugging us!" So many companies appear to have adopted this as their customer service philosophy!

Here are some real-life examples of poor customer service that the two of us have experienced in the last few months:

### **THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING PARCEL**

Simon needed to send five packages of important documents from the UK to various addresses in Western Europe. As they were required by a specific deadline he chose to use the services of a well know international courier firm. Conveniently, or so he thought at the time, he was able to take his packages and pay for shipment at a local stationery store which acted as a drop off point for the company concerned.

Simon decided to use the courier firm's 2 day service. This would get his documents to the various European countries well before the required deadline.

Initially it took over an hour for the staff member in the stationery store to process the shipments! The staff member was helpful and apologised for the delay. It was clear that the system they had to use was very frustrating and time consuming. Eventually the shipments were arranged and Simon paid a considerable sum of money to send them.

Two days later Simon tried to ascertain the delivery status of the packages using the courier company's website. This service did not work. He then telephoned the courier company's customer service department. After being passed around from person to person for about 20 minutes he eventually made contact with a very helpful gentleman who, despite his best efforts, failed to locate the packages in the system.

Simon was then transferred to another member of staff in another part of the courier company who finally admitted that the packages were lost somewhere between the UK and Europe and could not be located. When Simon pointed out that he had paid for a 2 day service he was told that he hadn't chosen the correct service, as the 2 day service was "not guaranteed". He helpfully advised Simon to "read the small print more carefully next time". He also added that there was nothing more he could do as the problem was with another division of the courier company.

Simon then asked to speak to a supervisor or manager. The member of staff refused to let him do this. The member of staff told Simon that his supervisor couldn't do anymore to help than he had - which was very little! After arguing with the member of staff for five minutes Simon was finally put through to the customer services manager.

The customer services manager took down details of the shipment and promised to contact Simon when he had obtained further information. Apart from the customer services manager phoning Simon back to get the shipment number he already had been given five minutes earlier, that was the last Simon heard from the company.

The packages that Simon had sent arrived at varying intervals over the next week or so with the final parcel arriving in Belgium eight days after it had been originally sent.

It was only after Simon wrote a detailed letter of complaint to the Chairman of the Board of the courier company (to advise him of the large gap between the company's advertised corporate values and the reality of dealing with the company from a customer's perspective) that the customer services director made contact and he and Simon had a lengthy and productive conversation!

We will return to this catalogue of customer service cock-ups later in the book!

## **WHEN FIRST CLASS SERVICE BECAME STANDARD CLASS BUREAUCRACY**

Chris paid £327 for a first class ticket for a train journey from London to Manchester. He found his reserved seat which turned out

to be the only part of the journey to go well as Chris was about to discover...

Railway staff member: "Sorry sir there is no hot food or hot drinks on this trip..."

Chris: "Well we still haven't left London yet so you could still do something about that. It's a 3 hour journey and we haven't eaten as we were expecting a meal to be available."

Railway staff member: "Sandwiches and cold drinks only, sorry."

Chris: "That's not good enough is it? Surely you must have planned around this? What can you do about it to help?"

Railway staff member: "You can fill in this form and complain. I'm just doing my job."

Chris: "Ok I would like two cheese and one salmon sandwich."

Railway staff member: "Sorry sir, only one of each allowed."

Chris: "You are joking! Why?"

Railway staff member: "It's the rules - so everyone gets a choice."

Chris: "So what you are telling me is that I have paid over £300 yet there is no hot food and no hot drinks which is part of the advertised package, you haven't planned any contingency and the alternative is sandwiches of which I can choose only one of each selection and you have a form I can fill in?"

Railway staff member: "Exactly sir."

Unfortunately this is a true recent story from a company that many consider a flagship in service. Chris did fill in the form and has still not heard back from the company concerned.

### **THE GOOD NEWS!**

We think that if you provide bad customer service it can be a wonderful, wonderful thing. Wonderful for your competitors that is! They will be very happy to steal your customers (and their money) from you.

The profusion of poor customer service that exists today is great news for companies that do provide their customers with really good customer service. If you make sure that you provide really great

customer service then you will steal customers from your competitors, hang onto the customers you have for longer, attract new customers and end up making a serious impact on your bottom line.

Thankfully we do also have some examples of excellent customer service we have received recently!

### **THE RIGHT ATTITUDE**

Simon was in his local supermarket recently buying a sandwich for lunch. A member of staff was re-stocking the sandwich shelves and was standing right in front of the sandwiches Simon wanted. The conversation went like this:

Simon: "Excuse me could I get to those sandwiches please?"

Staff member (with a big smile): "Of course!"

Simon: "Thanks - sorry about the interruption, no sooner are you trying to get the shelves re-stocked when some annoying customer comes along and gets in your way!"

Staff member (with an even bigger smile): "We'd be lost without you!"

The smile and the comment were impromptu and genuine, and what an excellent attitude to customers they reveal. The staff member was 100% correct - they, and you, would be lost without your customers.

### **AN ARRESTING EXPERIENCE**

Simon was running a week long leadership development programme in Bremen, Germany. At about 10am on the Monday morning of the week, he was setting up the room for the week's course and several members of hotel staff were walking in and out of the room arranging tables, coffee, water etc.

As there were so many people coming and going Simon didn't notice a man (who was not a member of the hotel staff) walk into the room and walk out again with his bag that contained, amongst other things, his laptop and passport. The laptop contained the materials required for the week's course (Powerpoint slides etc). Luckily Simon had a back up copy of these on a CD which unluckily was also

in the bag! This was a major set back and was going to make running the course a challenge.

Fortunately, a member of the hotel staff recognised the man (he was well known locally as a thief) and saw him walk out of the hotel and jump into a taxi (the hotel was next door to Bremen's train station and main taxi rank). The member of staff phoned the local police and gave them the taxi's licence plate.

Less than ten minutes after the theft had been reported a policewoman arrived at the hotel to take details of the theft from Simon. As she was doing this she received a message over her radio to say the thief had been arrested!

Apparently, as soon as the police received the call, they immediately identified the taxi firm involved and contacted them. The taxi firm then radioed their driver asked him where he was going to and when he arrived the police were waiting to arrest the thief!

Simon was understandably relieved and asked the policewoman when he would be able to get his bag and laptop returned. He explained the urgency of getting it returned and the policewoman said she would see what could be done.

Simon then began making hurried contingency plans as the course was due to start at 11am giving him about 30 minutes to overcome the loss of the course materials.

Just before 11am, as the delegates for the leadership programme were taking their seats, the policewoman walked into the room to deliver Simon's bag and laptop! Simon decided to recognise this fine example of customer service by kissing the policewoman (she was after all very pretty and he doesn't like to miss an opportunity!) much to the amusement of the German participants who had never seen anyone kiss a member of the Bremen Police Force before!

The following day Simon received a message from the Bremen police saying that the thief had been arrested, charged in court and was expected to be on his way to prison the following day. The police *apologised for any inconvenience the incident had caused and wished Simon a pleasant stay in Bremen!*

This story proves that providing exceptional customer service is not confined to commercial organisations! Despite the fact that many

public sector organisations appear to have forgotten that their purpose and duty is to serve their clients (after all our tax payments do pay the salary bill) providing outstanding levels of service is important in every organisation.

### **NO BAGGAGE IN THIS COMPANY**

Chris was travelling to Brazil and in his luggage was all of his research for this book - months of case studies, notes, moments of inspiration - all ready to be turned into print. You guessed it... No bags on arrival at the airport, the usual form to complete (slightly more difficult as it was in Portuguese) and an uncomfortable sinking feeling of "*will I ever see the bags and my work again...*"

Two days and twenty plus phone calls later and still no bags...

In a moment of inspiration (or perhaps desperation) Chris went to the airline's website and discovered that there was a facility to email the company's President.

Within an hour Chris had an acknowledgement e-mail and it was personal enough for him to know it was not a "canned" reply from an auto responder that we so often receive in response to email.

Three hours later... A reply that the bags had been located and would be with Chris in 3 hours - and they duly turned up!

Three days later Chris received a letter and a "money off" duty free gift voucher by way of apology.

This was a great recovery service and they get Chris to tell everyone about it in this book and got him to spend more money on duty free than he probably would have spent in the first place!

So it is possible to recover from service issues. However, you need the process, people and attitude to do this. More on this as we progress further into the book!

## **Where Customer Service Fits Into The Selling Process**

The first book in the "Bare Knuckle" series was "Bare Knuckle Selling", the second "Bare Knuckle Negotiating" with this book "Bare Knuckle Customer Service" being the third. Why three books?

Well there are some vital things you must be able to do to prosper in business and indeed in life in general:

1. You must be able to convince people to take certain actions
2. You must be able to agree favourable terms for the actions to take place.

In plain English these two vital things are:

1. Selling
2. Negotiating

Selling is all about locating potential customers and encouraging them to take certain actions - usually to purchase a product or service or to enter into some form of arrangement or agreement with you.

Negotiation is about agreeing the terms upon which the purchase, arrangement or agreement will take place.

If you can't sell and you can't negotiate then your business will struggle. However, there is a third element to the process. That is the important area of *keeping* your customers and developing your relationship with them.

The importance of looking after your customers and keeping them safe from your competitors was touched upon in "Bare Knuckle Selling" but such is the importance of customer service that we decided to devote an entire book to this critical subject.

Customer service is about keeping the customers you have. If your customers are happy with you they will continue to do business with you, and may place increasing amounts of their business with you. It is interesting to note that on average it costs six times more money to make a sale to a new customer than it does to make a sale to an existing customer.

However, customer service is not just something that you should think about after the selling and negotiating has been done. As was discussed in "Bare Knuckle Selling", the savvy business person uses their existing customers to refer them to new customers. Every single customer you have is a source of referrals but only if they are happy with your products and services. If you have given your customers a poor level of customer service then they are not going to refer you to their friends, family, contacts or acquaintances.

Excellent customer service must also be thought about as a vehicle for generating business with new customers as well. Satisfied customers will provide referrals and testimonials. And testimonials from satisfied customers can be very, very persuasive when added into your selling process.

It's a tough world out there - and it's getting tougher! Modern commercial life is very challenging with tens of thousands of businesses going to the wall every year. Businesses that do survive are finding that their profit margins are being squeezed, new customers are becoming harder to find, and more and more competitors are moving into their overcrowded marketplace.

It does not matter if you are a multi-national corporation or a small, one person business. In today's competitive modern world you need to provide exceptional customer service.

"Bare Knuckle Customer Service" will help you to attract, keep, develop and profit from totally satisfied customers. Let's get going!

**Simon and Chris**

# 1

## Customer Service... Why Bother?

*"Although your customers won't love you if you give bad service, your competitors will."*

KATE ZABRISKIE

"Okay, okay!" we hear you cry, "It's all very well for you to preach to us about customer service! Do you know how tough it is to look after customers in today's competitive marketplace? They just seem to want more and more and want to pay less and less every single day! And it's getting more and more expensive to pay for providing exceptional customer service."

Well the good news is that the real truth (and you won't read this in many books about customer service) is that actually you don't have to provide exceptional levels of customer service! Yes that's right - you don't actually have to bother with customer service at all, because...

### Survival Isn't Mandatory

You don't have to provide excellent standards of customer service in today's competitive marketplace. The survival of your business isn't mandatory. If your business fails then one of your competitors will soon be looking after your customers instead of you. The commercial world will carry on turning without you. Someone else will quickly step into your shoes and take your ex-customers' money. This may sound harsh, but it's the truth.

We recognise that providing exceptional customer service, when customer expectations keep rising and business continues to get tougher and more competitive, can be a challenge. In fact, it's all rather disturbing isn't it?

However the purpose of this book is not to comfort the disturbed. Its purpose is to disturb the comfortable - or at the very least to disturb the complacent!

As Simon says in his keynote speech "How to Raise Your Game" - GET REAL!

Face the brutal truth. Customer expectations will continue to rise. Business will get more competitive. That's just the way it is. You can snivel, moan, complain that life isn't fair and go out of business or you can take responsibility (or as Simon would say - GET a GRIP!), rise to the challenge, and *do something about it*.

## No One Said It Was Going To Be Easy

Looking after customers isn't always going to be easy. Your competitor's number one aim is to steal your customers. There will also be customers who seem to take great delight in making unreasonable demands, being aggressive, nasty or rude. That's just the way it is.

Thankfully such customers are relatively rare (and one of the great things about having a successful business is that you can be choosier about whom you do business with) and you can do a lot to keep your customers out of the claws of your competitors.

Looking after your customers and keeping them happy makes it incredibly difficult for your competitors to steal them. As any salesperson will tell you - the hardest person to sell to is a totally satisfied customer!

And the poor levels of customer service that many of us experience on a day to day basis are really good news for you. Businesses that provide exceptional customer service are going to go from strength to strength. Too many businesses make it incredibly difficult for people to spend their money with them. Exceptional customer service can help to make your business more profitable - and we can prove it.

## Can Customer Service Influence Your Company Profits?

As you are reading “Bare Knuckle Customer Service” we are assuming that you are sold on the idea of providing exceptional levels of service to your customers. However you may be wondering (as any successful business person would do) whether the cost of providing exceptional customer service is really worth it. Can you really know that you will get a return on your investment in customer service?

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, YOUR BOTTOM LINE AND SHAREHOLDER VALUE

The relationship between customer satisfaction and a successful business outcome isn't just desirable - it's paramount.

Anecdotal evidence abounds to support the theory that high customer satisfaction is important. However, most CEOs need proof, to move them to action to make an investment in customer service. Customer satisfaction can often be seen as intangible as compared with other business priorities, so there are two actions that need to be taken to ensure service is top of the agenda in your company:

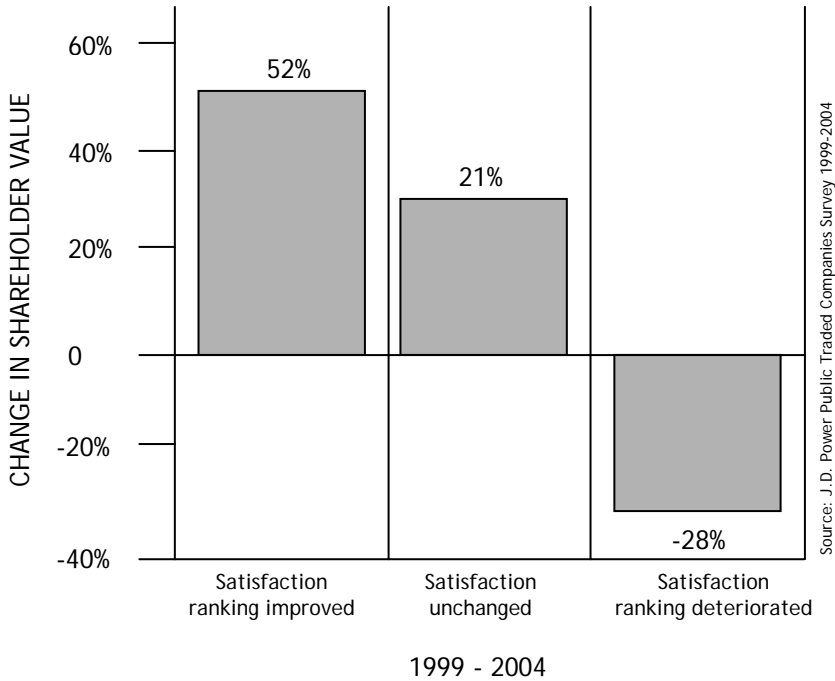
1. Make it tangible - show the research that links customer satisfaction to bottom line profit and shareholder value.
2. Adopt a methodology that truly shows that customer satisfaction can be measured.

In terms of these two objectives, we would recommend two standards to consider:

## The Relationship Between Satisfaction & Shareholder Value

J.D. Power and Associates, founded in 1968, is a global marketing information firm that conducts independent and unbiased surveys of customer satisfaction and buyer behaviour for many industries. In Chris's many years of Customer Service experience, and particularly at his time at Dell, he trusted J.D. Power as the source of excellent, objective service measurement.

To illustrate the first of our action points please take a look at this:



In this survey, publicly traded companies were divided into three groups whose customer satisfaction ranking over a five year period:

1. Improved
2. Deteriorated
3. Stayed the same

The companies that improved their customer satisfaction rating more than doubled their shareholder value, whilst those that had deteriorating ratings lost more than 25% of their value.

The second methodology as a convincer for focus on your customer satisfaction revolves around research through Bain, a leading US consultancy who were instrumental in Chris's days at Dell in designing a truly groundbreaking Customer Segmentation Strategy.

Their work in customer satisfaction is based on what is called a Net Promoter Score.

Customers fell into three categories:

- **Promoters** - Customers who are enthusiastic about the company's products and services
- **Passives** - Customers who have no complaints
- **Detractors** - Customers who tell the world about their bad experience

Detractors can have far more impact on corporate reputation than Promoters but both are crucial along with moving Passives upwards to Promoters.

Within Chris's company - Mentor Group - they use what they call "The Ultimate Question" which enables them to capture this vital information:

*"How likely is it that you would recommend Mentor Group to a colleague?"*

There are numerous ways to capture Promoters, Passives and Detractors using this question. Mentor uses a simple scoring rating - asking the Customer to express his likely recommendation into a score as follows:

1 - 5 (Detractors)

6 - 7 (Passives)

8-10 (Promoters)

You can then measure your Net Promoter Score by compiling all of your customer feedback in one case and subtract the ratio of Detractors from that of Promoters. High Net Promoter Scores are good!

Studies have shown that the result of high customer satisfaction is retention. The key behaviour you are looking for in your customers being Loyalty.

High Net Promoter Score results invariably correlate with high profit growth, as at Dell where a 5% increase in customer retention was found to yield up to 100% increase in profits!

Enough proof perhaps for any CEO to take you seriously when you want to invest in customer service? And if you are the CEO of your own business then we hope we have convinced you!

As stated previously we are assuming that the fact that you are reading this book means that you were already sold on the importance of good customer service. However, the fact that it is *proven* to improve the financial performance of your company really drives the point home, doesn't it?

## Even More Reasons To Focus On Your Customer Service

If you have ever used Ebay, you will be familiar with the feedback system this website uses. Buyers and sellers give feedback on the level of service (amongst other things) each the people they deal with provide.

Whilst some experienced Ebayers have commented that the feedback system is not perfect, it does give users an insight into the level of service they can expect from a buyer or seller.

If you are considering purchasing an item on Ebay, you are more likely to do so from a seller with excellent feedback than from a seller with poor feedback. Although such detailed feedback is not available on most mainstream businesses, *people do talk* - and as we will see later - the internet allows them to communicate their views more widely than ever before.

People who experience good customer service will often go out of their way to convince other people to do business with the company concerned. Think about it for a moment. If you have got really good service from a company then wouldn't you want your friends and family to know about it so they can get the same benefit?

When Simon and his wife Karen had a new kitchen fitted in their house, they used a local company who provided a high quality kitchen at a competitive price. In addition the level of customer service received was exceptional. As a result of their experience Simon and Karen have recommended the company to a number of friends, with the result that several of these people have also become customers. There is no financial benefit for Simon and Karen in making the recommendation - they just want to help their friends and family to find a great company to buy a fitted kitchen from.

Research suggests that people who experience good customer service will tell 2-3 people about it. Whereas people who experience bad customer service will tell 6-9 people about it!

Word of mouth advertising is the cheapest form of advertising there is. However, if you want your business to survive and thrive then you must make sure that what is coming out of people's mouths is positive and not negative.

*"If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might tell 6 friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends."*

JEFF BEZOS  
FOUNDER OF AMAZON.COM

The internet gives every customer and prospective customer instant access to a vast amount of information. In a few clicks of a mouse people can access more information than at any other time in history.

Increasingly, people are using the Internet to conduct research into potential purchases. People can compare prices, research companies and read feedback from people on the products and services they may be thinking of buying.

Review sites are now easily accessible in a matter of seconds.

From Amazon to Ebay people use feedback from other people to guide their purchase decisions. Indeed, potential purchasers of "Bare Knuckle Customer Service" will be influenced by the ratings other readers give the book at Amazon. So when you have enjoyed and benefited from this book please make sure you visit Amazon and give it a review!

Research by Professor Robert Cialdini from Arizona State University has revealed a number of factors that are hugely influential in getting people to make decisions or to say "yes" to proposals. Cialdini has identified several factors that are largely unconscious and automatic, and therefore *very* persuasive.

One of the factors that Cialdini has identified is called "Social Proof". This is the influential effect of what other people are doing. If we see

or hear of someone doing something it influences us to do it too. On the internet we may not be able to see or hear what someone is doing but we can read what they have said - and very easily! The trend to use the internet for purchase research is only set to continue and another reason to ensure in the high visibility online world that your "word-of-mouth" advertising is positive and not negative.

## Harness The Power Of Inertia

Many human beings have a tendency to inertia. Inertia is a property of matter by which it continues in its existing state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line unless that state is changed by an external force.

In business terms this means that many people will continue to use their current supplier and to trade with the same companies *unless something bad happens!* By and large human beings like what is familiar and, even in today's competitive modern world, more people stay loyal to existing suppliers than switch to new ones. The oft repeated phrase "If it ain't broke don't fix it" certainly seems to apply.

If you really look after your customers, and you don't give them any reason to look around for a new supplier, then the power of inertia alone will probably keep them buying from you. If you are looking after them, and giving them what they need, a competitor would have to provide a very strong reason to get them to change.

In an extensive survey consumers were asked to list what they considered the most important elements of good customer service. The top two were:

1. Availability
2. Accuracy

Availability relates to the product or service being available when the customer requires it. This not only relates to product being physically available (on the shelf) but also to customers being able to access a service or get access to service departments and so forth. If you want to keep your customer's business then you, the relevant support people in your company and your product and service must be readily available to the customer when they want it.

Accuracy relates to the correct product or service arriving when it is supposed to arrive. The customer gets what the customer was expecting. This is doing what you said you were going to do. Not doing what you promised you would do is just about the fastest way we know to lose sales. It also creates dissatisfaction which allows the competition to get their claws into your customer's business.

By focusing on Availability and Accuracy, not only will your customer service be of a higher standard than many of your competitors (remember how bad customer service is generally!) but you will also harness the power of inertia and keep your customers spending their money with *you*. This is not an exercise in complacency, far from it. This is an exercise designed to make sure your competitors struggle to get their foot in your customer's door.

## Today's Excellent Customer Service Is Tomorrow's Average Customer Service

It is important to focus on the fact that providing excellent customer service is not a passing phase. You can't just focus on customer service for a while and then consider the job done.

Providing excellent customer service has to become an integral part of your company's processes, behaviours and culture. However, another mental shift has to take place at the same time.

Achieving excellent customer service is an on-going challenge. Your competitors (if they have any sense) will be continually upgrading and improving their customer service and your customer's expectation of what is good customer service will continue to evolve too.

Let's look at the example of hotels. Forty years ago en-suite bathrooms were seen as a luxury. Now they're expected. Thirty years ago having a television in your hotel room was seen as a luxury. Now it's expected. Twenty years ago being able to make tea and coffee in your room was seen as something special. Now almost every hotel provides the facility. Ten years ago satellite television in your room would have been something special. Now it's expected. Five years ago internet access from your hotel room would be unusual. Now it's expected.

This trend is everywhere you look. Ten years ago if you were to purchase a salad in a supermarket you would probably walk away with a soggy lettuce and some tomatoes which you had to wash and prepare. Now you can buy pre-packaged exotic salads that are instantly ready to eat.

Next day delivery used to be something unusual. Now it is widely available. The internet generation operates on internet time. They are used to instant access, instant answers, instant contact, instant downloads and instant purchases. Internet time is measured not in minutes but in seconds.

Banks used to be open from 9am to 5pm. Now you can phone your bank 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If you want to you can even call your bank on Christmas Day!

People are now more contactable via mobile phones and Blackberry's. People are switched on and plugged in 24/7. And they expect the businesses they deal with to be the same.

## **By The Inch It's A Cinch... By The Yard It's Hard**

It's understandable that faced with all the above customer service challenges that you may start to feel somewhat overwhelmed. How on earth can any business hope to keep up to speed with the ever-increasing customer service demands being placed upon it?

A pragmatic approach is to make a planned series of small on-going improvements. If you make just a 1% improvement in your customer service each day, imagine the result at the end of the year! The difference would be incredible. The secret is to make small on-going incremental improvements that become habitual. We will devote time to this important topic later in the book to help you define a +1% mentality, methodology and practical steps to apply this for your individual customer needs.

You may need to take some bigger steps as well. You might even want to make some quantum leaps, and this is good. But don't underestimate the power of continuous incremental improvement. It is a positive and practical way to stay ahead of your competitors.

## **If You Can't Be Different - Be Different!**

In today's competitive marketplace the goods and services that companies provide often don't differ that much from each other. No sooner is an innovation brought to market than competing companies copy it.

What can be widely different is the way in which these goods and services are supplied! Product A and product B might not, on the face of it, appear to be very different. Product A is supplied swiftly, cheerfully and in accordance with the customer's delivery requirements. Product B arrives late, the delivery driver is surly and he arrives at an inconvenient time for the customer.

When the customer has to choose where to spend their money next time will they buy Product A or Product B? The answer is obvious. What is perhaps not so obvious is that the customer will probably be willing to pay more for Product A than Product B. People are often prepared to pay more for exceptional service.

## **The Wow Factor!**

A common customer service error is to over-promise and under-deliver. If you want to really set yourself apart from your competitors try reversing the equation. By this we don't mean telling the customer they will get a really poor service and then surprising them with average service! We do mean providing something more for the customer than they expect to get. This is sometimes described as the WOW factor!

When Chris was at Dell, even in the early days of running customer service, you knew that even if you had a very, very good day - with over 6 million customers/users in the UK (at that time) there would sometimes be a number of escalations - where a customer complaint was elevated to the senior managers in the company.

These escalations were referred to at Dell as "golden reminders". As a senior manager, if you could add value in the resolution, the customer tended to remember the outcome which, if successful and skilfully handled, was positive.

## The Responsibility Rests With You

*“The reality is that we use and enjoy products that we wouldn’t have wanted if they had been proposed to us at the start of the development. The responsibility for innovation always rests with the supplier.”*

JONAS RIDDERTRALE & KJELL NORDSTROM  
AUTHORS OF “FUNKY BUSINESS”

There are a number of ways that you can define your future customer service standards. Firstly, you can wait to find out that your competitors are doing a better job than you. Whilst we are passionate advocates of market intelligence and making sure you know *exactly* what your competitors are up to, if you adopt this as your approach then you will forever be playing “catch up”. You will always be following your competitor’s lead.

The second approach is to have a customer service leadership philosophy. With this frame of reference you are constantly (and we do mean constantly) looking for ways to serve your customer better.

Although the above quote from the book “Funky Business” relates to product development, the principle holds true for customer service too. The customer will be used to current service levels and will often not expect anything better. They may indeed be satisfied with current customer service levels. However, by going beyond what the customer expects, you can create a special bond between the customer and your company. Make them feel special, exceed their expectations, give them something they don’t expect, and you give yourself an edge or even create a gap between yourself and your competitors.

It doesn’t always have to be something incredible or clever. Simon recently paid a considerable sum of money to attend a specialist internet marketing seminar. The seminar was excellent and was great value for money.

At the seminar Simon was given a free set of DVDs of a previous seminar. The subject of the previous seminar covered a topic that

added greatly to Simon's knowledge of internet marketing and was highly complimentary to the seminar he was attending. The free DVD set was not mentioned prior to the seminar and was a genuine example of added value.

Simon has benefited greatly from both the original seminar and the free DVD set. The seminar organiser exceeded Simon's expectations with a simple but valuable free gift. Simon has had a positive seminar experience, is likely to attend future seminars provided by the company in question and will recommend the seminars to friends, colleagues, clients and associates.

By constantly asking yourself, "How can we improve our customer service?" you will find and develop new ways of exceeding your customers' expectations. Involve all of the people in your organisation in this quest. Hold regular brainstorming sessions involving all members of staff. Ask for and reward suggestions on improving customer service. Make the quest for continual improvements in customer service part of the very fabric of your company and you will reap the rewards.

## **Customer Service Is Not Just For Big Corporations**

We would like to stress that although many of the examples we will use in this book are from large companies, customer service is equally (if not more so) important to smaller companies. A large company may be able to afford to lose some customers (for a while at least) but a smaller company cannot.

One of the advantages that smaller companies have is that they can be far more flexible with their customer service than larger companies.

So read on, and we will strip customer service strategy and tactics to the bone! We will build up a service strategy, service brand and service best practice and most importantly help you see how to apply these to your business whatever its size.

## Key Messages from Chapter One

- There is a proven link between customer service and bottom line profit. Customer service isn't a "nice to do" it is essential.
- Happy customers will recommend your company to their family, friends and colleagues.
- Unhappy customers will tell *lots* of other people about their experience!
- If you look after your customers the power of inertia will help to keep them doing business with you.
- Two drivers of good customer service are Availability and Accuracy.
- Your customer's expectations of good service will continue to increase.
- People are often prepared to pay more for exceptional service.
- WOW your customers! Exceed their expectations!
- Large, medium or small business - you must provide great customer service if you want to thrive and survive.

# 2

## Start Where You Want To End

*"If you think you can or think  
you can't - you're right."*

HENRY FORD

A simple and effective way to achieve outstanding levels of customer service is to give your customer whatever they ask for, whenever they ask for it. Unfortunately this is also a simple and effective way to go out of business!

Customers will always want to get the best they can - best price, best quality, best delivery, best warranty and so on. However, providing your customers with the best across all the aspects of your business isn't always going to be possible or profitable. There has to be a balance. As with any investment you have to balance the financial cost with the financial return.

Although you absolutely have to provide good levels of customer service, how this looks will vary from industry to industry and from business to business.

If you fly business class with an airline you will have certain expectations of the service you are going to get. If you fly with a budget airline you will have different expectations. You won't be expecting a glass of champagne to be handed to you as you board the aircraft if you are flying budget!

Different business models, different customer expectations, different customer service offering. Although the relationship

# About The Authors

## Simon Hazeldine MSc, FInstSMM

*“...a hard hitting speaker who will give you a wake up call that you’ll never forget!”*

- “Simon Hazeldine is a superb presenter who packs a punch!”
- Simon is in demand as a facilitator, keynote speaker and consultant in the areas of leadership, performance and persuasion.
- His high impact speeches and seminars have received rave reviews and standing ovations across the globe.



Simon has run his high impact leadership, persuasion and performance seminars in over a dozen countries across four continents. His training programmes for sales managers and negotiators are currently being used in 28 countries around the world.

Simon is the author of four books: *“The Inner Winner”* (endorsed by success guru Brian Tracy); *“Bare Knuckle Selling”* (foreword by sales and marketing legend Dr Joe Vitale); *“Bare Knuckle Negotiating”* (foreword by Duncan Bannatyne from BBC TVs *“Dragon’s Den”*) and *“Bare Knuckle Customer Service”*.

Simon has a Masters Degree in the Psychology & Management of Performance and is a Certified Master Practitioner and Trainer of NLP. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Sales & Marketing Management and a member of the Professional Speakers Association.

Prior to his current career, Simon provided event security and bodyguard services to celebrities from the television and music industry. He has trained in the martial arts for over twenty years and also “enjoys” running marathons.

Simon Hazeldine has the experience, expertise and authority to make a big impact at your event.

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## Chris Norton MA

*"... a straight talking industry expert who delivers what he promises."*

- Chris has the practical experience and ability to propel your Customer Service into a new dimension.
- Chris has worked with many of the top FTSE and NASDAQ corporations.
- With a successful track record in the areas of sales, customer service and coaching others to greater success he is in demand as a "hands on" consultant.



Chris is a Director of Mentorgroup Ltd ([www.mentorgroup.co.uk](http://www.mentorgroup.co.uk)) a leading UK Consultancy, a Director of Watford Football club, and holds non-executive positions with a number of UK-based businesses.

He has had over 25 years of experience with Honeywell and Dell Computer Corporation where he held Technical, Service, Sales and Leadership positions.

Chris has a degree in Electronic Engineering and is a Certified Master Practitioner and Trainer of NLP.

He has a wife and two children - a 28 year old and a 4 year old!

As well as a passion for football, Chris has run several marathons and is a keen golfer.

Chris Norton has the track record, experience, compelling desire and attitude to succeed with organisational change, growth and achievement.

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