

HOME BUILDER CUSTOMER SERVICE[®]



A NEWSLETTER FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

National Edition Volume I Issue 3

Presented by Professional Builder Training LLC

November 2009

Thinking Outside of the Box:

Undertaking a Paradigm Shift in Customer, I mean Client Service



Last month, I posed the questions, “Why not call them Client Service Managers?” and “Why not call your customers ‘clients.’” My reasoning is the word “client” has the connotation of a more professional relationship than “customer.” I got some interesting, and insightful feedback from Paul Haggerty, Vice President for Lennar Homes in Tempe, Arizona. He pointed out, “Client suggests a continuing relationship. Customer seems more like one transaction.”

His observation reveals a lot about our industry culture. Homes inherently seem like a more “permanent” purchase. Consciously or not, maybe we view the new home transaction as a “one shot deal”, rather than an ongoing relationship. The reality is people move frequently for a variety of reasons – changes in family, marital status, age, jobs, circumstance, etc. Perhaps using the word “client” would remind us that we should be treating the buyer as not only current business, but potential repeat business as well. Repeat customers do happen in homebuilding. In my superintendent days, I can recall building some homes for repeat customers. Even if buyers don’t end up being repeat customers, shouldn’t we treat them like potential ones? It makes sense!

In this issue of “Home Builder Customer Service” we wrap up our series on becoming a customer service superstar and begin a new series of articles on communication with a look at managing one of the most important tools in the business – the telephone. Effective communication is much more than words alone. Like Patricia Fripp, the noted customer service, sales and motivational speaker points out, “Every communication either corrodes or cultivates the (client) relationship...therefore, you are only as good as your worst employee.’ Training provides the means to become better communicators. Please see our website at www.probuildertraining.com for more info. Scott

Becoming a Customer Service Superstar

The Basics Part 3: Verify, Review, Finalize

We can all stretch the envelope and deliver a level of customer service that exceeds our customer’s expectations. Just to review what we’ve discussed previously, the formula for success goes as follows:

- 1. As a consumer, think about your own outstanding customer service experiences.**
- 2. Use those experiences to expand upon your definition of CS. Go to a higher level.**
- 3. Build a relationship with your customers by first understanding their point of view.**
- 4. Express genuine empathy to their situation so that they know you understand.**
- 5. Build rapport through expressions of commonality to strengthen the bond.**
- 6. Conduct your inspection with them and educate them. Don’t just fix, explain.**
- 7. Set realistic expectations as to who is coming, when they are coming, and what they are going to do using an under-promise/over-deliver approach that is timely and as convenient as possible for the clients, yet within your company’s guidelines.**
- 8. Schedule the work, then follow up with all concerned prior to the work day.**

(cont. pg. 2)



“Becoming a Customer Service Superstar Pt 3” (from page 1
The day the work is to be done, at least call, or even better show up to check on the progress being made no later than half way through the time window established for work that day. Use your discretion as to whether more follow up calls with the pertinent subs are necessary. Check back when you’re down to the last hour of the work window for that day and make any calls that are appropriate at this time.

Verifying progress throughout the day demonstrates that you are staying on top of the situation. If you can do this in person, you not only demonstrate your commitment, but you also can inspect and the work for quality and accuracy. Hopefully, everyone has shown at this point and done what they were supposed to do. Repeat the process for any additional work days you’ve scheduled. If not, find out what didn’t happen and why. In a perfect world, this should not happen, given that you’ve not only scheduled the work but also made follow up calls. In reality, this is not always the case. Make additional arrangements if necessary.

Once everyone has come and done the necessary work, show up to inspect and **review** with the homeowner that everything is complete to both their and your satisfaction. Have the homeowner initial each item on your original list as you go back through the home together. This is essential should a discrepancy emerge later. Sometimes you’ll find that other’s in the home have a differing opinion as to what’s complete and what isn’t.

Finalize the work order by getting the request signed off per your company’s procedures. This is always best done in person. Never try and get the sign off if the work is incomplete and never mention any kind of bonus you may earn for getting the sign off. That’s not only inappropriate; it can cause you to lose your job.

Once the sign off is in hand, be sure and thank your homeowner for their assistance, leave them with another of your business cards, and end the meeting. Process all paperwork per your company’s procedures.

By following the model for conducting customer service that we’ve described, you’ll find you increase your success and effectiveness as a builder warranty rep. The outstanding service you provide will not only result in more happy homeowners and more positive referrals, but greater job satisfaction for you as well. There’s no reason why you and everyone else in your organization cannot become a customer service superstar!



Next Month’s Topics:

- **Communication**
- **Customer Phone Skills 2**

Please visit our website:

www.probuildertraining.com



Customer Phone Skills Part 1

1. Greet Callers Professionally

- Begin with “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon.”
- Mention your company name and/or location.
- Identify yourself.
- Speak clearly and SMILE – it makes a difference.

2. Practice Good Listening Techniques

- Exercise patience – don’t talk over them.
- Repeat information back to the customer.
- Ask questions.
- Avoid instant responses.
- Let them say what’s on their mind.
- Take notes and let them know you are doing so.

3. It’s Not Only What You Say, It’s How You Say It.

- Studies have shown that the words you say on the phone make up 15% of the message sent. The rest of the overall message comes from how you say it.
- Other factors: inflection, pacing, volume, tone

4. Choose Your Words Carefully

- Avoid negatives.
- Express empathy if it’s appropriate to do so.
- Apologize if it’s appropriate to do so.
- Use their name in conversation.

5. If Possible, Emphasize What You Can Do for Them, Not What You Can’t

- Use the “soft no” approach. Avoid the words “no” and “not”. For example, “The warranty period for that item has passed.”
- Follow up with what you can do. For example, “I can give you the number for the manufacturer to see about replacing the part that went bad.”
- Use “and” phrases, not “but” phrases.
- Go above and beyond when practical and possible.

6. Avoid Being Emotional with Phone Customers

- Avoid customer contact if you are not in a positive frame of mind.
- If a customer is upset, allow them to vent to a point.
- Do not allow your customer to verbally abuse you.
- Suggest postponing the conversation if the caller cannot control themselves and starts to get abusive.