



## SELLING SMART

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# How Fit Is Your Customer Service?

As is the annual tradition, countless individuals (perhaps you) have made a New Year's resolution to get in shape. That's great, since regular exercise should definitely be part of your overall success plan. But what about your tire business? Have you ever considered the fitness level of your customer service efforts?

No, I'm not talking about some sort of employee exercise program. Rather, I'm asking if the employees who provide sales and service support to your customers are functioning at peak performance. If you haven't given this proper consideration, you're probably not seeing the big picture issues that could be hurting your business performance. Just like physical fitness, there are many aspects to managing the well-being of a customer service effort. In order to reach an optimal level of customer service fitness, your business must condition and strive to achieve peak performance in all of these areas. With that in mind, ask yourself the below questions to determine your current level of customer

this area leaves the door open for capable competitors to take the business away from you. Sales and customer service are the lifeblood of every business.

### No Train, No Gain! What Is Their Attitude?

Positive attitudes are the fuel that powers a world-class customer service engine, so be honest here. Does your management and work environment contribute or detract from proper attitudes? Do your employees feel appreciated and recognized by the company? Employee dissatisfaction can dramatically affect a company's customer service culture and, ultimately, its bottom line. If employees are feeling negative and under-appreciated, you can be assured that they will either directly or indirectly communicate this to your customers.

### How Do They Sound?

This area is often overlooked, but for effective customer communication, "how" we sound is actually more important than "what" we say. Along with appearance, the voices of your employees are a significant part of the first impression that a customer receives from your company. Winning teams (and the professionals in them) sound a certain way—positive, professional, upbeat. Do your employees sound that way or do they sound bored, tired and disinterested? Make some calls to your business and find out for yourself. If you're hearing less than pleasant, cheerful voices on the line, guess what? Your customers are too.

### What Do They Say?

Does your team understand how to have a true customer-focused conversation? Too often employees are me-focused and will recite the company anthem and provide product and service information like they're reading from a catalog. Not good. After all, it's about the customer—not you or your business. A healthy customer service effort consists of 100% customer focus and personalized attention 100% of the time.

As Stephen R. Covey put it in his book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," "seek first to understand, then to be understood." To build trust and maximize results in tire sales, employees need to first ask relevant

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service fitness in six key areas. The answers will give you a clear overview of where you are succeeding and where improvements need to be made this year.

### Are You Keeping Them In Shape?

Sales and customer service training and skills enhancements should be ongoing processes to ensure that your team is well-resourced and properly prepared to succeed. A sales organization that is not well trained often loses those precious sales opportunities, costing the businesses they represent substantial dollars in lost revenue and profits. The same is true of customer service. Without a well-trained staff, you're not maximizing customer interactions and any deficiency in



diagnostic questions to evaluate customers' needs/wants before making recommendations.

### How's Their Emotional Intelligence?

Whether face-to-face or on phone, every customer/employee interaction should have two distinct elements: a functional element and an emotional element. The functional elements represent the operational/transactional side of your customer interactions. The emotional elements are the people/relationship-building side. For peak customer service fitness, employee/customer interactions should have a proper balance between these two elements.

Although functional components are a necessary part of customer interactions, it is the emotional elements that build relationships with customers and create lasting loyalty to your business. Do your employees have the emotional intelligence skills to emotionally engage and connect with your customers on a personal level?

### Do They Have PRIDE?

As I wrote about in the June issue of TIRE REVIEW, PRIDE stands for "Personal Responsibility In Delivering Excellence." It is the commitment of employees to consistently deliver excellence in your organization. One of the leading indicators of a company's customer service health is the application of this principle and the consistent effort of employees to perform at a high

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level and exceed customer expectations. Unfortunately, personnel oftentimes are not exceeding expectations; they are, at best, just meeting expectations. This reality is very harmful to the business as consumer research has shown that companies typically lose 50% of their satisfied customers. Those customers who are merely satisfied will happily leave as soon as they find a business that provides the same product and/or service combined with a superior experience.

Ask yourself: do your team members practice PRIDE on a day-to-day basis? Is the service you provide ordinary (like an average competitor), or do you truly exceed expectations and deliver extraordinary service that influences customers to come back and promote your business to others? **TR**