

In this month's *Customer Service Newsletter*, Eric Davis of the Beryl Companies, an outsourced service provider for the healthcare industry, talks about some of the hiring and training strategies he uses in developing a top-performing customer service staff. Here he offers a general checklist, adapted from what his own reps learn and use, for creating a "positive customer experience" on every call.

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How to provide top-level performance on every call

Eric Davis, director of operations for the Beryl Companies, oversees hiring, training, and service performance for all of the company's customer service representatives — reps who handle more than 2 million calls per year from the customers of hospitals and healthcare organizations. His goal is to have his reps interact with customers with “the highest level of professionalism and compassion” in a way that enhances every caller's experience. Here's a checklist of recommendations that he offers his reps and others on how to accomplish that on every call.

Remember it is the customer's first call. It's very easy for a customer service rep to be focused internally. But remember that while this may be your 75th call of the day, this is the first contact, the first call, for the caller. They deserve the same energy and enthusiasm from you that you provided for the first caller of the day.

Change your mental perspective by changing your physical perspective. Halfway into a customer service shift, it's easy to lose your focus and energy. When this happens, stand up, stretch, do whatever you need to do to get your blood moving and to re-engage yourself in your work.

Take ownership of the call. This is one of the most powerful things you can do on a call. Often, callers have been passed around to different departments in the organization and are already frustrated. Take ownership of the call by using a phrase like, “I would be happy to help you with that,” and do everything you can to resolve the customer's issue before hanging up. If you are unable to help them directly, make sure you let them know that you will stay with them if you need to transfer so that they won't have to explain their situation again to the next person that they speak to.

Keep your own checklist. Many organizations have a formal Quality Assurance program that will be looking for specific service elements in every call. But whether you have a formal Quality Assurance program or not, keep a checklist of the things that you know make up a great call. Laminate the list so you can erase

and start over with every new call. Check off each element as you hit it on the call. This will help your QA scores and in general improve the level of service you are providing to all callers.

Make a friend. Your time at work shouldn't be just about taking calls. Get to know the people around you in the customer service center, and other people that you come into contact with in your organization. Nothing brings energy to a job like having a friend at work. The difference will be noticeable to customers when you are on the phone.

Voice tone will make or break your call. Proper voice tone conveys interest and energy. A flat, monotone voice, on the other hand, tells the caller you aren't interested in their problem. Be enthusiastic, but don't try to be someone you aren't. The goal is not to sound like a game show host. The goal is to let your natural voice speak for you.

Don't speak from a fixed position. When dealing with customers, always allow for the possibility that you could be wrong, or that you might be misinterpreting the problem or situation. For example, use phrases like, “From what I understand ...” or, “It appears to me ...” This will keep the conversation from turning into a confrontation that one side has to win.

Avoid using cold and controlling phrases. Using phrases like, “You have to ...” or, “I can't ...” will often turn a call into a confrontation. When you talk to customers, always focus on what you can do rather than what can't be done. And try to make suggestions to customers, don't give them orders.