



Bulletin

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Make the Most of 'Teachable Moments'

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An important element of customer service success is training, but what can you do if you have a limited (or non-existent) training budget and no time to set aside for instruction?

One of the most effective ways to create and maintain a profitable, customer-focused culture is to make the most of "Teachable Moments," everyday, on-the-spot learning opportunities—spontaneous chances to use the experience at hand to demonstrate a skill or principle. They can help your staff develop powerful 'soft skills' that create the kinds of customer experiences that yield profits. Here's how to make the most of some common teachable moments:

- **When you hear team members talk about their own experiences as customers,** ask how they felt during and after they purchased the product or service. Was the experience positive or negative? Was the service provider attentive, friendly, and responsive, or cold and removed?

If the service was poor, what choices might the provider have offered to make it better? Did the company live up to the expectations it created? Will they return as a customer? Will they refer friends to the business? When they understand the emotional impact their service providers have upon them, they'll better understand the impact that they have upon their customers—how everything they say and do can make or break a valuable customer relationship.

- **When you see team members 'walking the company talk,'** acknowledge them and express your appreciation for their delivering the value your company promises. If you overhear an employee patiently talk a customer through your company's delivery or ordering process, for example, that's the perfect time to say, "I'm really happy about the way you just showed your customer how thorough and dependable our company is. Keep up the great work!"

If you notice that a team member is returning customer calls quickly, praise him for demonstrating how responsive your organization is. You might add, "Responsiveness is something that we promise the customer, and that's what you're

delivering. Super job!" Delivered with sincerity, this feedback is encouraging and reinforcing.



- **When your radar picks up grumbling about customer complaints,** gently assist your team in reframing their perspective on customer complaints from problems to benefits for your company—"free consulting" feedback that uncovers service gaps or product problems.

More Positive Outlook

Use questions to help you shift your team's focus into a more positive outlook (and decrease their defensiveness). Ask them such questions as: How could you see that information as a benefit to us? What opportunity does that information open up to us to improve our customer service? What gap in our service did our 'free consultant' (a.k.a., the customer) just identify? How can we use this information to add value to our customer experiences?

- **When you become aware that employees are making tough choices that will benefit your company in the long run,** praise them for thinking ahead and considering the effects of their words and actions and how they're impacting others. "I like the way you think" is a simple statement, but it's packed with appreciation, motivation, and affirmation that will fuel your team to keep up their great work.

Teachable moments are a free, convenient, and powerful way to coach customer service staff members and create a positive environment of continuous learning and improvement.

Small learning opportunities show up every day—it's up to you whether you take advantage of them. And don't be surprised if improving your 'soft' skills yields hard, bankable results as customers become happier and more loyal. Small learning opportunities show up every day—it's up to you to take advantage of them.

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