In order to render top level customer service, there are certain minimum skills people must possess and tools a company must have. The tools are relatively easy to purchase or develop. Providing them is a key component of management responsibility. The skills, although an equally key part of management responsibility usually cannot be bought, but they can be taught.

**Tools**

- Reporting system to track and evaluate customer service performance. This need not be a complex system; it can be as simple as a scorecard.
- Forms, policies and procedures that make it easy for a customer to buy. Do your forms, policies and procedures complicate or simplify the purchasing process?
- Communication systems that allow for immediate access to a real person. Give your customers person-to-person contact.
- Communication systems that allow and encourage customers to deal with your company. As with policies and procedures, make it easy for them and you.
- Training seminars to expose every employee to contemporary views of customer service. Customer service is not common sense, it is an acquired skill.
- Adequate equipment to handle customer requests and requirements. You must have the infrastructure to support your goals.
- Work environment that is conducive to serving the internal and external customer. Make sure the place is clean, professional, organized and laid out properly.
- Readily accessed computer database containing all significant customer information. Have all your customer’s information in one, easily accessible and user-friendly database.
- Sufficient personnel and phone lines to limit “being on hold” to a minimum. The longest 10 minutes is 30 seconds on hold.
- Physical and equipment capability to deliver product or service on time.

**Skills**

- Keen observation of employee and customer behavior. Don’t judge people by what they say but by what they do.
- Active listening and open-mindedness about suggestions for improvement. You and your senior managers don’t have a monopoly on good ideas.
- Motivation to achieve continual improvement in customer service. Money is a good motivator but nearly so good as simple recognition of a job well done.
- Communicate goals and expectations clearly and concisely.
- Problem-solving that eliminates root causes and not just symptoms. Find the root cause and you’ll deal with the problem once.
- Focus on fully meeting customer needs. Remember the prior articles and their guidelines.
- Intolerance of ineffective performance. If someone doesn’t get the job done, then take action.
- Encourage admission of errors accompanied by a self-generated improvement plan.
- Be a consultant to, and partner with, your customers.

**About the Author**

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