

Sweat the Small Stuff for Great Customer Service

By Kathleen J. Wheelihan

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Undoubtedly you've heard about the popular book series that started with *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, followed by *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff at Work*, *...in Love*, *...with Your Family*, etc. While these books relay a message containing a great deal of wisdom—don't let the little things in life stress you out—it's important not to make the mistake of overlooking the little things that can be critical to achieve wildly successful customer service in your business.

At first I was hesitant to write this article because the message seemed so basic and even felt a bit preachy. However, I reconsidered after numerous reminders from family, friends, clients and my own personal experiences that every day people are subjected to poor service. You've heard the stories; you've experienced it first-hand. Driving through the fast food restaurant without a word or a glance when you pick up your food. The store clerk that doesn't say "thank you." The teller that greets you with only a gruff "Next!" The receptionist that ignores you while discussing last night's social events with other employees. The bagger at the grocery checkout that complains about the newest company policy.

Consumers are starving for good service. And what they're often hungry for may sound like little things — common courtesies that certainly wouldn't be considered rocket science — but combined together provide a strong foundation for great customer service. In many industries or markets there are usually a few select players that far exceed the rest of the pack, while the rest trail far behind, or drop like flies. After all, comparable product, place, promotion and price are the requirements to even be in the running. Read the news and consider retail, dot-coms, etc. The differences between those that are thriving versus merely surviving are the people and the little things they do (or don't do).

Here's a list of some of the little things, when experienced together can make a big difference to customers and how they view your organization:

- * Answering a call by the third ring
- * Transferring a call quickly to the proper person
- * Timely return of voice mail and e-mail
- * Eye contact
- * A warm smile
- * A friendly hello
- * Just a moment, I'll be right with you
- * Excuse me just a moment, let me find out
- * A polite and sincere tone
- * A genuine apology when warranted

- * You're welcome
- * A heartfelt thank you
- * An honest attempt to help
- * Your undivided attention
- * Following up as promised
- * Taking the extra step in any situation
- * Honesty about problems and mistakes

Customers can usually accept that problems and errors will occur from time to time in any business relationship. What often matters more to customers than the mistake itself is how these difficult situations are handled. Customers crave the common courtesies, which is not to say that the common courtesies can make up for gross negligence or repeated problems. However, the little things can go a long way to establish trust and rapport and create customer acceptance of your efforts to resolve problems when they arise.

If you're concerned about creating great customer service, begin by asking yourself this question: "Is your organization sweating the small stuff in customer service?" It really can make a big difference!

Kathleen J. Wheelihan is a professional speaker and consultant for AchieveMax®, Inc., a firm specializing in custom-designed keynote presentations, seminars, and consulting services. Kathleen has made presentations ranging from creativity to customer service and leadership to teambuilding for a number of industries, including credit union, education, government, health care, manufacturing, and real estate. She can be reached at 800-886-2MAX or by visiting <http://www.AchieveMax.com> .

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