

Issue 1, 2012

# Customer First

The Journal of the National Customer Service Association

**Evolving the  
Customer Experience  
at American Airlines**

**Respect  
the Customer**

Stand out among  
your competitors by  
making the most of  
customer service  
opportunities

**The Golden Rule  
of Service**

Practical advice on applying  
the Golden Rule to build  
customer loyalty

The tail of a 737  
proudly displays  
American Airlines' logo

**NCSA**

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## The first word...



Welcome to the Winter 2012 Edition of *Customer First*, the Official Journal of the National Customer Service Association. I know that our readers agree that our Journal and the NCSA website provide highly professional articles and information, placing the customer first and foremost in the minds—but more importantly—in the *behaviors* of

businesses across the U.S.

Highly effective companies know that the complete vision of the customer has to also include the *internal* customer. Karl Albrecht, founder of Aldi's, stated, "If you are not serving the [external] customer, you had better be serving someone that is." In other words, every employee has an internal customer—someone who is relying on their products or services—and their combined efforts are absolutely necessary to satisfying the needs of your external customers. These *internal* products and services may range from monthly operating reports to parts for a sub-assembly to clean floors—each an important contribution to the business' overall success.

I encourage you to create and sustain a culture that tears down the silos that are getting in the way of your business working in unison. The competition isn't between Operations and Marketing or Human Resources and Finance. It is between your business and every other business out there that has its sights on your customers. When one of your departments wins and another loses, then your entire company loses. It is that simple. But when you get all departments *willingly* rowing in the same direction, you become a force with which to be reckoned.

Good luck, and never lose sight of how you do what you do for your external customers—by serving your *internal* customers. We are here for you.

Best wishes,

C. William Crutcher, President  
National Customer Service Association

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# Evolving the Customer Experience at American Airlines



## THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TEAM AT AMERICAN AIRLINES

At American Airlines, our highest aim is to become a company whose actions speak loudly when it comes to providing an enjoyable, comfortable and convenient experience on our airline. This is a dynamic time at American, and as we work to change our business, our focus remains squarely on our customers.

First and foremost, we are committed to examining how our airline interacts with our customers through all touch points in the travel experience, and we will continue to evolve our products and services in order to make their time with us an enjoyable one—time well spent. To do this, we continue to invest in new products and services, including those investments we have made most recently, such as continuing our work on innovative, industry-leading technologies; modernizing our fleet with upcoming aircraft deliveries from Airbus and Boeing to give us the youngest fleet among our U.S. competitors; and delivering products and

services onboard our aircraft that will enhance the inflight experience of all our customers.

### **Investing in Technology**

Our mission is simple—we're dedicated to getting our customers to the important places, people and moments in their lives, enjoyably and safely. While there are countless examples of how we are working to improve the customer experience, one of the primary investments we are making to enhance your travel experience begins with technology. Today, we are working to improve the journey from start to finish—mindful that it really begins when a flight is booked and ends just beyond the baggage carousel.

American revolutionized the airline industry more than 50 years ago when we introduced the industry's first computer reservations system. Over the past decade, we've been working directly with our customers and employees to develop and deploy new technology solutions that have transformed our airline

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from the inside out—and at the same time, we’ve made it a priority to offer our customers cutting-edge technology choices to keep them connected and even entertained throughout the travel experience.

Our customers are mobile by definition, and tools like our mobile applications go a long way to enhance the customer experience. In fact, American’s suite of mobile offerings makes the airline accessible on more devices and through more channels than any other carrier, underscoring this commitment to keeping customers connected while they’re on the go. In addition to our popular apps for the iPhone and iPad, we have mobile apps for Android, Blackberry, Windows Phone, Barnes & Noble’s NOOK Color Reader and the Amazon Kindle Fire. These apps offer ease and convenience throughout the travel experi-

***“It is our job as a company to overcome our challenges while continuing to put our customers first”***

ence with proactive notifications, mobile boarding passes, parking reminders and other important information at our customers’ fingertips—and all of these features are included in the easy-to-use app. In addition, mobile boarding is now offered at 80 airports across our network, giving customers the option to receive boarding passes on a mobile device, bypassing the need to print out and present a paper boarding pass. No more switching from device to paper, or even switching from an app to an email to access anything our customers need for travel on American.

No matter the destination or time of day, we know staying connected and entertained is key. We continue to focus on the important steps we need to take to modernize the travel experience and offer our customers top-notch connectivity options. We believe

that our customers should have access to the same technologies and entertainment in flight that they enjoy on the ground. With this in mind, not only do we continue to install Wi-Fi across our domestic fleet, last year, we were also the first airline to offer in-flight streaming video on transcontinental flights. Our entertainment on demand product now allows customers to wirelessly stream hundreds of movies and television shows straight to their laptops. By the end of this year, our entire Wi-Fi enabled fleet will be equipped with entertainment on demand.

### **Enhancing the Inflight Experience**

The inflight experience is important to every one of our customers. As we continue to invest in products and services to enhance the overall customer experience, one of the most important aspects of the trip is onboard our aircraft. In 2011, we listened to our customers’ feedback and made changes to deliver the products our customers most expect.

We put a renewed focus on our food and beverage offerings inflight. This year we welcomed acclaimed chefs Richard Sandoval and Marcus Samuelsson to American’s culinary team and worked to develop menu items for both premium-class and main cabins that cater to our customers’ tastes. We also rolled out a new suite of amenities for our customers traveling in First or Business class between the U.S. and Europe, Asia, India and on 777 or 767 aircraft to South America. Customers are now offered new slippers, a new lighter duvet and new amenity kits with Dermalogica skin-care products and other travel essentials. First Class customers traveling internationally on a Boeing 777 will also see an added lightweight day blanket and new turndown service, complete with a quilted bed topper and comfortable pajamas, making us the first U.S. carrier to offer a turndown service.

Last year, we also became the first domestic airline to offer complimentary branded tablets—Samsung Galaxy 10.1 Tablets—in the premium cabins of select transcontinental and international flights. Our customers can navigate through a custom-built experience on the tablets that provide quick and easy access to a personal universe of movies, music and TV shows at 35,000 feet. Overall, our onboard offerings

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are evolving to meet customer needs and we look forward to what's in store as we continue to deliver in this area.

### **Building the Youngest U.S. Fleet**

In the past year, we made a lot of progress in our fleet-renewal plans, plans which are sure to enhance the travel experience across our network in the near future. In July of 2011, we announced the largest aircraft order in aviation history—striking landmark agreements with Boeing and Airbus that will eventually make American's the youngest fleet of any U.S. airline over the next five years. We also began taking delivery of our first Boeing 737-800 aircraft that has the Boeing Sky Interior—a new and innovative interior that offers larger overhead bins, new seats and new lighting features.

When customers step onboard our new aircraft, they will see new features and amenities. The planes will have additional overhead bin space—meaning more room for personal belongings; a modern, contemporary atmosphere with enhanced lighting options—meaning more comfort no matter what time of day they are flying; and the latest in inflight video and Wi-Fi, that will help keep customers productive and entertained throughout their journey.



**A passenger enjoys new amenities, part of American Airlines' inflight customer experience**

The people of American Airlines are committed to making the travel experience a good one. We realize it won't always be perfect, but we want customers to know that we are working hard, every day, to earn our customer's business and loyalty. It is our job as a company to overcome our challenges while continuing to put our customers first. And, we hope our actions—even more than our words—will demonstrate that. ■



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*Land of the free because of the brave.*

# Respect The Customer

BY BRAD PATTERSON

When you hear the term “customer service,” what is the first thing that comes to mind? It might be a good experience, a bad experience, or possibly the reputation of a particular brand or organization. All of these can and do form the expectations for our customers. Getting less than what is expected creates a gap, and therein lies the frustration. Customers get upset when they don’t get what was promised, someone was rude to them, they perceived an attitude of indifference, or no one listened to them. They want you—and, regardless of your title, at such times you may represent your entire company in their minds—to listen, to take responsibility and ownership of correcting the problem or issue, and to pay attention to the details.

Regardless of the industry, product or service, a company’s reputation for customer service is only as good as their least satisfied customer. I have always created my customer service cultures based on a slogan borrowed from a major overnight delivery service provider: “Treat every package like it is your own.” It is a simple yet effective philosophy, and it can be modified and applied in any organization. In conjunction with the philosophy, identify the essential traits you want teammates providing customer service in your organization to have. For me those traits are: friendly, intelligent, informed, responsive, supportive, and resourceful. Set expectations for the employees providing the service and hold them accountable to meeting them in every customer service opportunity. Just as the individuals with the traits listed above are important, so is the structure in which they work. So many companies today rely on phone menus as the first point of contact and multi-tiered models for problem resolution. I am not a fan because often times I find myself talking to numerous people and telling each one my story before finally connecting to a person who can resolve the issue. Or I will have been promised something by the first person I talk to, only to eventually hear on my customer service adventure, “I apologize for you being misinformed.” Since my

expectation is to treat every customer service opportunity like it were my own, these types of models just do not work for me. If at all possible, have the first point of contact in your customer service model be a subject matter expert and someone empowered to resolve the issue. Remember that your service reputation is only as good as your least satisfied customer.

Another attribute I insist on being engrained into my customer service culture is education. What do I mean by that? It is not always possible to have the first point of contact be the subject matter expert or the individual who can resolve your issue. The larger the organization, the more complex the reasons for this challenge become. In my profession, commitments or promises made by others cannot always be fulfilled due to legal or regulatory requirements. Work to keep the customer service experience as positive as possible by educating your customer as to why something cannot be done. Spend the time necessary to help them fully understand what you did or did not do and why.

There will be occasions that can not be avoided when an answer is not known or a resolution cannot be immediately found. If so, then the best response is to be honest and simply say “I don’t know.” Do not provide an answer that you hope is right or one you



**Respect for your customer is an essential basis for every customer service opportunity**

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hope will pacify the customer. Set the expectation as to when you think the issue can be resolved and keep the customer updated as soon as possible if that expectation cannot be met. If they do not hear from you along the path towards resolution they can only assume the reasons why and most will not be good. One of my favorite sayings (author unknown) is "To my customer. I may not have the answer, but I will find it. I may not have the time, but I'll make it."

While brand loyalty is still important to some, I believe more and more people are migrating towards those organizations that have figured out that customer service is the differentiator. Our customers are using the Internet like never before to review our products and services as well as our customer service. The old adage (author unknown) holds true: "If we don't take care of our customers, someone else will." ■

*Brad Patterson, CPP, has been a payroll professional for nearly twenty years. He is currently the Corporate Manager – System Payroll for SSM Health Care based in St. Louis, Missouri.*



*Brad has led payroll teams for large firms in various industries, served as the Payroll Leader for the largest business processing outsourcing firm in the world, and consulted for one of the Big 4 accounting firms.*

*He is a member of the American Payroll*

*Association (APA) and the Gateway Association of Payroll Professionals. In 2003 Brad received the APA's Meritorious Service Award and in 2006 received the APA's highest honor by being named the Payroll Man Of The Year.*

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# Service Builders

## *Touch Point Pointers - Building the Relationship After the Sale*

Direct customer contact time during an actual purchase or delivery of a good or service may range from a few days to less than a minute, depending on the industry and specific customer contact procedures. Whether you are face-to-face or server-to-PC with your customer, here are some ways you can continue to nurture your relationship with your customer after “the sale”:

### **Set it up**

Gather as much customer contact information as practical during your initial contact. In today’s economy, it is important to secure email information as it remains the primary—and thus most critical—conduit for customer contact. Explaining to your customers how you intend to use their contact information will prepare them to be accepting and thus more responsive to your future communication with them.

### **Find an opportunity—or create one**

After the sale, there are many opportunities for continuing contact, or touch points, with your customers. Choose ones that will work for your business and budget. Most can be accomplished via email, postal mail, or a telephone call. Here are some ideas to help you get the ball rolling:

- Follow up on a sale or service delivery with a thank you card or email
- Send a card or email for birthdays, anniversaries and holidays
- Notify your preferred customers about special advance sale shopping hours
- Send a personal invitation for customer appreciation days
- Consider sending a discount coupon or giving away a logo/promotional item
- Remind them that you’re there to serve them and check on any changing needs they may have

### **Choose the right approach**

Everyone can no doubt relate to the awful feeling of being hounded by telemarketers or having an email inbox full of unwanted solicitations. And many of us even remember the days of door-to-door salespeople. The last thing you want to do is leave your customers feeling turned-off, so the key to maintaining positive contact is to ensure that your customers feel value in your ongoing contact efforts.

To that end, respect their preferences for both type and quantity of communications. Balance contact points with respect for your customers’ time, and use caution not to smother them. If your customers want to receive a telephone call when only a certain product goes on sale, don’t call to notify them of every new product release. Likewise, if your customer specifically requests not to receive emails, honor their request. When they receive only one card for their birthday and their inbox remains un-bombarded, they will appreciate your respectfulness.

Recognize that your customers’ communication preferences may change, so make sure to give them the opportunity to unsubscribe from mail, email, text message, telephone, and any other contact lists.

Finally, whatever the occasion and type of touch points you choose, the key is to strive for communication richness by personalizing them as much as possible. With the right knowledge, opportunity, and approach, you can use touch points to build stronger and more profitable relationships with your customers.

# The Golden Rule of Service

BY MARY REINA, INDEPENDENT BEAUTY CONSULTANT AND SALES DIRECTOR WITH MARY KAY COSMETICS



When I was asked to write an article for *Customer First* magazine, my first reaction was feeling honored and humbled at the same time. I am excited to share with you my personal experiences and wisdom I have gained along the way regarding how important it is to provide great

customer service to our clients!

I have been an Independent Beauty Consultant/Sales Director with Mary Kay Cosmetics for 16 years. Coming from a healthcare and human service background, I knew that this business would be a good fit for me. Because what I do is considered the “beauty business,” I feel I have the best job in the world—helping women every day to look and feel good about themselves. I believe the success of Mary Kay is evidenced by the quality products we promote, the 100% customer satisfaction that we guarantee, and the customer service we provide.

## The Golden Rule

Mary Kay has based the way we do business on “The Golden Rule” (treating others the way we want to be treated) and providing what Mary Kay calls “Golden Rule Customer Service.” Mary Kay founder, Mary Kay Ash, always said, “Treat everyone you meet as if they have a sign around their neck that says ‘Make me feel important.’” What an awesome opportunity I have every day to do just that!

I have found that by putting people first, you can never fail at your day to day service to others. I have heard that “Knowledge is power,” but I also have found that empowering others is even more powerful and rewarding! I believe that our knowledge and experience is second in importance to showing a genuine interest in your customer. No one said it better than Theodore Roosevelt: “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

## Relationship Builders

Customer service is about building relationships. Although relationships are complex and strong ones take time to build, there are some key actions you can take that will always create a good foundation. Here is what has been most valuable to me in defining and developing the practice of good customer service:

**Make a good first impression** by dressing for success. Looking “the part” encourages people to do business with me and affects how I represent my product. Is my demeanor welcoming? Do I attract or attack in my initial contact? Being sincere and genuinely attentive to clients’ needs, I have found, will begin to build trust in that professional relationship. Integrity is everything!

**Ask questions** of your client. What need do they have that your product or service can fulfill? Once you have identified it, explore a more precise service you will provide for them. Keep in mind that everyone is different and no two people have the exact same product needs.

**Follow-up** is crucial in my business. Developing a genuinely professional relationship with your customers is not just making a sale. Showing an interest in their satisfaction with their purchase or service will always bring clients back to you.

**Always be prepared** to “deliver the goods.” Being an independent contractor and a small businesswoman, I have my own inventory updated and ready to deliver in a timely fashion. Having what your customers want when they need it is a plus and is why they keep coming back to do business. It shows you appreciate their business and are invested in them.

In business, as in life, I have found that service to others is a good habit to develop. By providing great customer service you are not only building your business—you are building people and making this a better world to live and work in! **Much Success!**

# Service Statistics

## *Prioritizing Service – Cost vs. Value*

As consumers tightened their belts during the economic difficulties over the past few years, some businesses made the faulty assumption that cost would outweigh total value in their customers' decision making process. Many of those same businesses are now changing tack, realizing the cost assumption could be disastrous in the long run.

### According to Central-e-Commerce:

- Even in the current economy, customer experience is a high priority for consumers, with 60% often or always paying more for a better experience
- 81% of companies with strong capabilities and competencies for delivering customer experience excellence are outperforming their competition
- 90% of North American firms view customer experience as important or critical to business plans—80% of the firms would like to use customer experience as a form of differentiation
- 86% of consumers quit doing business with a company because of a bad customer experience, up from 59% five years ago
- Customer churn is caused by customer feelings of poor treatment 68% of the time
- It takes 12 positive service experiences to make up for one negative experience—if you get the chance
- 91% of unhappy customers will not willingly do business with your organization ever again
- Attracting a new customer costs five times as much as keeping an existing one
- Happy customers who get their issue resolved tell approximately four to six people about their experience

Source: *Central-e-Commerce.com*

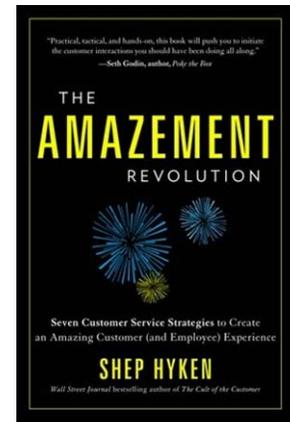
## Recommended Reading

### ***The Amazement Revolution: Seven Customer Service Strategies to Create an Amazing Customer (and Employee) Experience***

Reviewed by Andi Freeman

Shep Hyken begins his New York Times bestseller *The Amazement Revolution* by speaking about “the right thing to do.” The seven customer service strategies he promotes spring from deep, if very basic, personal experiences. For example, he was taught at age 12 by his mother to write a thank you card when he received a gift. So when he started his childhood job as a magician, he followed these steps:

- Show Up Early
- Stay Late
- Do Your Best
- Always Say Thank You (thank you card)
- Give People More Than They Expect
- Follow Up



He followed these steps not because he had a brilliant business strategy but simply because he learned at a young age what “the right thing to do” was. Today his successful business operates using these exact simple steps.

In the book’s ten chapters, Shep Hyken examines 50 “role models” (various size businesses) that have implemented from some to all of the 7 Amazement Strategies, teaching us that any size company can utilize these strategies effectively. He provides a detailed explanation of how these 50 role models have implemented these strategies as core principles and the results they have thereby achieved. Hyken leaves the reader with a To-Do List and a Brainstorming Worksheet, tools that will help guide your business—if implemented even in part—from the Culture of Uncertainty to the Culture of Amazement.

I found Hyken’s book extremely enlightening and was left feeling inspired by his assertion that the day to day struggles businesses encounter today can be easily turned around, not by some elite over the top (sometimes unreachable) business plan, but just by doing the right thing. The strategies he details are simple and obtainable.

*The Amazement Revolution* was easy to read, easy to understand, and definitely worth the time. I would recommend this book to any business owner or leader who wants to achieve Amazement.

#### **Details:**

Authored by Shep Hyken

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*Andi Freeman is a freelance author and financial services expert.*

## Service Reminder

*“There are no traffic jams  
along **the extra mile.**”*

*~ Roger Staubach*



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# ...the last word

*A sale is not something you pursue,  
it's what happens to you  
while you are immersed in serving your customer.*

~ Unknown

When making a sale, the easiest way to get what you want is to give the customer what they want—making it about the *experience* and not the sale. ■

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Mobile Apps



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Mobile Boarding



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