

# The best customer service tips



JEFF SAMSONOW, CAPITAL IDEAS

More from Jeff Samsonow, Capital Ideas ([HTTP://EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM/AUTHOR/JEFF-SAMSONOW-CAPITAL-IDEAS](http://edmontonjournal.com/author/jeff-samsonow-capital-ideas))

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In the heart of the holiday shopping season we asked Edmonton entrepreneurs to share their best lessons and tips about great customer service.

Here's what our community of business owners helping business owners have learned along the way:

“The best way to build exceptional client relationships is to take the time right up front to get a genuine appreciation for their needs, and match those realistically against yours and your team’s capabilities. If you can provide them with a great client experience, then strike up the band and the dance begins. If their needs are different than our capabilities, be honest about it and guide them to another provider. This creates fewer downstream conflicts and the best possible opportunity for your team to make positive impressions.”

Rick Tiedemann, executive director at [Copeman Healthcare](http://www.copemanhealthcare.com/)  
(<http://www.copemanhealthcare.com/>)



*Without customers, there is no business. I like Mahatma Ghandi's quote which I have paraphrased - 'Customers are never an interruption of our work, they are the purpose of it. We are not doing a favour serving*

*them, they are doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.'*

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*Alison Phillips, president and co-owner, Aligra Wine & Spirits (<http://www.aligrawineandspirits.com/>)*



Alison Phillips, president and co-owner of Aligra Wine & Spirits /Photo: Alison Phillips

“First, be polite. If you’re not enjoying your day, maybe customer service isn’t for you. And don’t push past customers, let them go ahead (I can’t believe how much I see this happen, especially during the holidays). Second, get inside the client’s head. Find out what their need is – what’s working, what’s not, what do you have that will solve their problem? Find that out and then focus. Feature dumping doesn’t work if you’re not meeting the client’s needs.”

Erin Prefontaine, communications and client service specialist (<https://ca.linkedin.com/in/erin-prefontaine-0382818>)

“Trust the process of life. The universe’s timing may be different than ours. A client hired me to present at their conference. We signed a contract; he paid his non-refundable deposit. All was proceeding normally until everything was cancelled by another department. Presenters, venue, catering, everything kiboshed. I don’t normally return deposits but my client was very apologetic and sincerely promised that we would work together in the future. My colleagues wondered if I was crazy – and so did I. Three years later he did hire me for their conference. I learned that there are honorable people in all organizations.”

Lynn Fraser, coach, mentor and owner of Balance Your World  
(<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lynnfraser>)

“A great customer service tip is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. Always treat people with respect, honesty and integrity. If you like it when people open the door for you; open the door. If you like it when people treat you with respect if you buy something or not; show respect. If you want an honest answer; then give one. Customer service is best served with values and integrity.”

Dan Dromarsky, capital partner at Enviro-Plus Business Services Corp  
(<http://www.enviro-plus.ca/>).

 *“Listen well... Let your customers talk so you can learn their needs and requirements.”*

*Nadine Litwin, financial consultant*  
(<https://ca.linkedin.com/in/nadelitwin>)

“The best customer service tip I have learnt is to never pre-qualify a potential client. It is far too easy to assume things about people before we know their story. We don’t know what they are looking for, what they can afford or how we can help them until we get to know them. It will never serve your business to pre-qualify potential clients – your number one job

is to get to know your client.”

Stacey Hogbin, owner of Wevive Fitness (<http://www.wevivefitness.com/>)

“My commercial debt recovery company is a service-based business. We offer a 5 Point Client Commitment Guarantee. If we do not meet our commitment in our clients mind, dinner for two is on us. Simply send in the receipt for full reimbursement. I don’t tell the client how much to spend and they must trust me to pay them back. Works beautifully and is very tangible.”

Brad Lohner, CEO of The PCR Group of Companies

(<http://www.pcrgroup.ca/>)

“Listen carefully to your customer this will determine if you are able to help them or not. Sometimes what they want is not what you can provide them, so it’s best to be honest and get it over with initially. Always speak with a smile and a positive attitude to put people at ease and have a better experience with your Company. Being interested and engaged will encourage them to tell you what they expect from your company.”

Suzan Burtic, president of Legends Limousine

(<http://www.legendslimousine.ca/>)

Respond to complaints as quickly as possible. A quick response can defuse frustration and anger in itself. The response should never be based on an explanation or excuses. Apologize right away if it’s warranted and make sure they feel heard, then address the problem as quickly as possible. Sometimes you may not even be able to fix their problem but if you treat them fairly, quickly and honestly, customers are most-often more understanding and flexible than you would think.

Blaine Bertsch, founder of Dryrun.com (<http://dryrun.com/>)

“The most important time that you can spend with your customer’s is on developing, nurturing and establishing a relationship with them. Showing a genuine interest in them, what’s important to them, and their families. Letting them get to know more about you as well. This relationship will only flourish if you are active listeners. If you can become more effective

with this skill, you will have many loyal customers that will continue to support your business for years to come. Mainly because of the relationship and trust that they have established with you. This isn't everything you should or can do....but it is a great start."

Keith Soubliere, general manager for Beyond Vision Optometrists  
(<http://www.beyondvision.ca/>)



*"Make it about them and listen, listen, listen. It doesn't matter how fabulous your product or service is if it doesn't solve a problem they legitimately have. The whole interaction has to be about how you can make things better for them. If you can't, then it's ok to walk away. But you'll get to that conclusion a lot faster by focusing on them from the outset."*

*Nadine Riopel, owner at Nadine Riopel Professional Services  
(<http://www.nadineriopel.com/>)*



Nadine Riopel, owner at Nadine Riopel Professional Services / Photo: Nadine Riopel

“The best customer service lesson is really to “listen to your customer” don’t cut them off or jump to a conclusion about what you ‘think’ they might want. Their need might actually be quite different from what you initially ‘think’ it might be. People will be much more willing to talk to you if they know you will hear them.”

Jim Ackney, Amsoil dealer (<http://www.findsyntheticoil.com/>)

“I think the best approach to fantastic customer service is circular – (1) anticipate or ask about impending customer needs, (2) implement a solution, (3) test with customers to confirm you’ve hit the mark, (4) repeat from step 1. At Solution 105, our periodic upgrades to our online services for energy and environmental reporting engage our customers and their tenants to reduce their utility usage, and the time and money we save them is an extra bonus!”

Chris Vilcsak, president of Solution 105 (<http://www.solution105.com/>)

“My best customer service lesson is that of describing and clarifying what my work is. In creating something unique, you must stand behind your work. My ‘Ceremonial/Jeweled Beach Sandal’ is foot jewellery that adorns the side of the foot but can be worn either with or without shoes. Very comfortable and illusional. I call it taking vintage to a whole new level.

People like and appreciate green, unique, versatile and local.”



*“Make everyone who comes to speak with you feel like a person and not a number! This is achieved by listening and asking questions to get to know their needs!”*

*Crystal Puim, owner and lead  
photographer at  
[Crystal.Puim.Photography](http://crystalphotos.ca)  
(<http://crystalphotos.ca>)*

Shirley Zago, jewellery designer at [G&G Designs](http://gandgdesigns.com)  
(<http://gandgdesigns.com>)

“Understand that customer satisfaction is just a ticket to the game. If you want to win the game, satisfaction is not enough. Figure out how to wow your customer with every experience and they will become your raving fans and they will be the best sales force you could have.”

Laurie McNaughton, [business/executive coach, trainer and speaker](http://actioncoach.com/lauriemcnaughton)  
(<http://actioncoach.com/lauriemcnaughton>)

“Don’t be fooled by the words customer service, it is not about service, it is about experience. the customer experience trumps service which can be the most outstanding but still fail as an experience. Service often starts and ends with direct contact, but the experience is pre, post and present. Create an outstanding experience and the service will be unbeatable.”

Darryl Moore, vice president, marketing and communication at [Executrade](http://www.executrade.com/) (<http://www.executrade.com/>)

*“In providing the best customer service, one must be personally and fiercely accountable in making sure the customer’s needs have been met and finding ways to get things done. It may be very challenging at the start but really understanding what the customers needs are and being a great listener, is a skill that cannot be undermined.”*

*Wayne Kryzalka, managing director, entrepreneurship at ATB Financial (<http://atb.com/business>)*

“Learn as much as you can about the business you operate in, your competitors, and your clients. Then take the time to educate your customers in every interaction. People will view you as a reliable source to base their purchasing decisions and they will be more likely to defer to your judgement when they have concerns.”

Josh Spurrell, president of Spurrell & Associates Chartered Professional Accountants (<http://www.spurrell.ca/>)

“We think of our clients as more than just ‘clients.’ We take an active interest to understand their business with a vision of cultivating an ongoing partnership. With this honest and sincere approach, we exceed client expectations, resulting in word-of-mouth advertising and referrals.”

Kris Hans, strategist, Market Grade Ltd. (<http://marketgrade.com/>)

These answers are in response to a question posed by Wellington Holbrook, executive vice-president of ATB Business (<http://atb.com/business>). Here’s his top piece of advice:



*“Probably the best lesson I have ever learned is that no matter how good the service (fast, easy, or whatever...), nothing ever replaces the experience that is created by a personal connection that a client feels when they know that you are looking out for them. Personal care and attention shown to a customer goes further than anything else, every day, and I have literally hundreds of my own personal experiences to back this up.”*

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Submit your answers at the Capital Ideas website

(<http://capitalideasedmonton.com/home/weeks-question/?source=EJ0106>) by Friday morning. We'll publish the best answers, along with your business name and website in an upcoming post.

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