

AIWD

Nov - Dec 2022

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WORLDWIDE MARKET



Phoenix, AZ - It has been a privilege work in the Welding Supply, Industrial, Beverage, Medical, & Specialty Gas business for 44 years. You can be sure there have been many changes. For the most part, change is good. There are times however that it's not. What you're going read is not new, it's a reminder of how fragile businesses in general are and how we are all being evaluated.

When I was in college, I was taught to be a student of people and today, that's easiest when I am shopping. At that time, I have expectations that I want met. Needless-to-say, as a business owner, it's a measuring instrument that I use with my own business.

I can compare sales associates, store neatness, product presentation, product knowledge, product quality, and the list goes on and on. I take information and utilize what I learned.

Recently, I saw a Walmart job listing. I was stunned to see they have job offerings paying from \$15 to \$40 per hour. Now, I am certain that the expectations of an employee making \$40 per hour is higher than the employee making \$15 per hour. How do they gauge that difference?

Today, consumers expect customer service to be better than ever. 80% say the *experience* a business provides is *as important as the products or services it offers*. So how can you & I "WOW" our consumers and make every interaction better than they expect? While writing this, I read a startling statement, "On average, customers expect better than average."

This being the business world today, how do we foster and train employees to provide better than average & exceptional service? The answers are simple so please read further and have your employees read this.

KNOW YOUR PRODUCT

As a customer support representative, you spend all day troubleshooting for customers, and that means you need to be a product expert. Knowledge of your product is an essential customer service skill. Ideally, you should believe in your product, be able to discuss features and use cases in an insightful way and show your customers how the product can benefit them — not to mention troubleshoot anything that's not working right! Your job is to help your customers get the most out of their purchase and feel like they have gotten true value for their money. Make it your goal to learn everything there is to know about your product(s) so you can amaze your customers with timely recommendations for using new features and services.

MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Attitude is everything, and a positive attitude goes a long way in providing excellent customer service.

"The right attitude changes negative customer experiences into a positive customer experience," say a local VP of Operations and Customer Service. Since most customer interactions today are not face-to-face, your attitude should be reflected in your posture, language as well as your tone of voice.

Don't ever forget that it's easy to misinterpret the tone of written communication, and email or live chat can come across as cold. The brain uses multiple signals to interpret someone else's emotional tone, including body language and facial expression, many of which are absent online. Don't be afraid to convey warmth and good humor or pick up the phone or make a personal visit if you find an email or chat conversation getting tense.

USE CREATIVITY IN PROBLEM-SOLVING

Over 80% of customers have "churned" because they experienced bad customer service. That's everyone in our business must thrive on solving problems for our customers and make it a central part of our support role. Rest assured there will always be problems to solve.

You may have heard of the legendary customer service at Zappos.com. For example, they once sent a best man free shoes the night before the wedding after his order was sent to the wrong location due to a mistake by the delivery company. Zappos solved a problem and exemplified excellent customer service. Most importantly, they won a customer for life and gave the man a story that he couldn't wait to share with his friends.

Don't be afraid to wow your customers as you seek to problem-solve for them. You could just fix the issue and be on your way, but by creatively meeting their needs in ways that go above and beyond, you'll create customers that are committed to you, your company and product.

RESPOND QUICKLY

66% of people believe that valuing "their" time is the most important thing in any customer experience. Resolving your customers' inquiry as quickly as possible is a cornerstone of good customer service. Speed should be of the essence — especially for smaller issues that don't take much time to solve.

Competing in a Worldwide Market

Continued...Pg 2 of 3



That being said —great customer service beats speed every time.

Your customers will understand that more complex queries take time to resolve. There's a difference between the time it takes you to respond and the speed at which you resolve their problems. Customers don't want to languish in a "ticket queue", but they'll spend as much time as it takes to resolve their issue. Lesson? You & I should, too.

Get back to your customers as quickly as possible, but don't be in a rush to get them off the phone or close the issue without resolving the issue completely.

PERSONALIZE YOUR SERVICE

40% of customers say they want better "human service". That means they want to feel like more than just a ticket number. They get angry when they're not being treated like an individual person, receiving boilerplate responses, or being batted like a tennis ball to different people. Customers want to interact with a person — not a company. It's part of the reason why many businesses send gifts to their customers on their birthdays.

Do you know not only your customers' names, but also their birthdays? How about their interests or hobbies? Can you make them laugh? It's obviously not possible to do this for everyone but going off script and giving the personal touch when you can be an important way to show your customers you know them, and you care.

In business software *Help Scout*, tickets are called "conversations" to encourage support teams to think about requests in the queue in a more personalized way. So, whether you're using *Help Scout* or one of its competitors, or your own program consider how the support tool you use can help you personalize your support interactions.

HELP CUSTOMERS HELP THEMSELVES

That said, customers don't always want to talk to someone to get their problem solved — often, they want to quickly resolve their issue themselves. Among consumers, **81% attempt to take care of matters themselves** before reaching out to a live rep. Further research shows that 71% want the ability to solve most customer service issues on their own.

Self-service is a scalable, cost-effective way to make customers happy — that's the thinking that led to *Help Scout's Beacon*, which puts help content front and center so customers can find answers right where they are without leaving the page. Then if they're unable to answer their own question, help from a real person is just a couple clicks away.

FOCUS SUPPORT ON THE CUSTOMER

Your customers are the most integral part of your business, and they come before products or profit. Treat them like they are the center of your world — because they are.

According to Kristin Smaby in "Being Human is Good Business," "It's time to consider an entirely different approach: Building human-centric customer service through great people and clever technology. So, get to know your customers. Humanize them. Humanize yourself. It's worth it."

Southwest Airlines put this principle into practice in a very memorable way when one of its pilots held a flight back to wait for a customer traveling to a funeral. They put the human before their targets, and that customer will never forget it.

ACTIVELY LISTEN

Paying attention to customer feedback includes looking back over the data, as well as listening in real-time. Show your customers you hear them when they take the time to speak to you. Listening increases the chances that you'll hear your customers' real problems and can effectively solve them, resulting in happier customers. Listen to what they have to say without pushing your own agenda. Don't assume that you know what your customer is going to say. Demonstrate active listening skills; when you're on the phone or live chat, use phrases like "It sounds like..." and "Do you mean...?" or, "Let me make sure I've got this right." Make sure you repeat the problem back to them in your own words to show you've heard them.

Active listening also means you are mindful of your customer's unique personality and current emotional state so you can tailor your response to fit the situation. Customer service is not one-size-fits-all.

Competing in a Worldwide Market*Continued...Pg 3 of 3***KEEP YOUR WORD**

If you promise something, making sure you deliver on it is common-sense customer service. Don't let your customers down. Keeping your word is about respect and trust.

For example, if you promise an SLA uptime of 99%, make sure you keep to that standard. If you promise to develop a certain feature in your software in a particular time frame, make sure you deliver on that. When you break your word, like saying you'll get back to a customer within 24 hours and you don't, offer something to make up for it. If your customer's delivery goes awry, offer to replace it and refund their money for their trouble. You might lose some money in the short term, but you'll gain a loyal customer.

Interestingly, customers do not feel extra grateful when you deliver more than you promised. They do, however, feel angry if you break a promise. It's still better to under-promise and over-deliver so you can make sure you never break this important social contract.

BE PROACTIVELY HELPFUL

Going the extra mile is one of the most important things you can do to deliver great customer service. This is when you have checked all the boxes, yet you still want to do more.

Sometimes being helpful means anticipating your customers' needs before they even have to articulate them. In fact, sometimes customers may ask for one thing without realizing that they really need another. It's your job to anticipate their needs and provide for them.

When customers feel like you value them — like they're truly special to you — they'll keep coming back. This may be linked with the phenomenon of reciprocity in social psychology: If you do something nice for your customers, they will want to do something in return — like buy your products!

Sending them a small gift "just because", or giving them a rare promotional code, will speak to your customers' egos and demonstrate your genuine appreciation of their business.

I read that Nashville's Gaylord Opryland hotel delivered truly helpful customer service when a customer asked them where she could buy a particular alarm clock they had in her room. The hotel gave her one as an unexpected parting gift, winning them one very delighted customer.

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS BY PROVIDING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

All of the elements above combine to produce great customer service. Talk regularly with your employees about this. It's great customer service that keeps your customers loyal to you and your business — and that earns you a reputation for being helpful and a pleasure to work with. Customers want to be treated like people, not a number in a ticket queue. Humanize them, and humanize yourself, for customer service-driven growth

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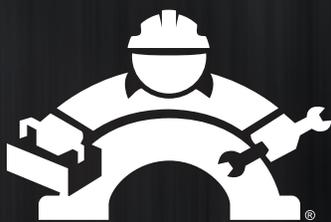
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Becoming an AIWD BOARD MEMBER



Lumberton, TX - One of the most eye-opening experiences that I have had as a member of the AIWD buying group was the day I attended my first board meeting. When I was asked to serve on the board, I had been a member of the group for about 16 years. I thought I had a good handle on the group and sort of assumed there was not much that went on daily or monthly in the group. I could not have been more wrong.

During my time as a board member, we did not have an executive director. This meant many of those dealings fell to Diane and the board. This was extremely stressful during the preparation time for the show. All the board members were reaching out to members who were required to attend that had not registered yet. This also meant we would make calls to potential members that had reached out through our website. This also meant we were planning and executing our own board meeting agendas, keeping the minutes and figuring out who would take care of tasks that we had discussed. Not to mention, we were having meetings to interview potential executive directors.

I think I can honestly say that none of the board members that I worked with during this time regretted their roles on the board. It was truly a work of love for each of us.

Now that I have shared the hard side of the board member's life, I would like to share the life of a board member now that we have an executive director. Being on the board is not designed to be a burden to those serving. It is designed so those that are on the board represent the regions that they live in and provide a voice for them throughout the year. The members own this group and Diane and I report to each of you through the representatives of the board.

Managing the group is what I do full time. I am not like a board member that is trying to run his business and serve the members of the group. I recognize this. I do all that I can to minimize the time commitment that the board members give. I do this by taking care of the day-to-day tasks for the group and reporting back to the board during our monthly meetings. During these meetings we discuss the highlights and go over any important decisions that need to be made.

The time commitment of a board member is not insignificant and does vary based on what the group currently has going on. In a typical month a board member will attend our monthly meeting that usually takes 1.5 to 2 hours. We have goals to get this down to an hour and we are usually on the lower end of this. Outside of our monthly meeting I will occasionally send out emails to the board with information to review and respond to. I also send out text messages for approvals on tasks or to ask for opinions. These are ways that I keep everyone up to date with what I am working on and get feedback without having to convene a meeting. It is hard to put a finger on this amount of time, but I would like to think that spread over a month this would be less than an hour but no more than two. So, with an estimated max commitment of 4 hours a month, these men and women affect the change in the group with major efforts to improve our group daily.



I have never talked with a member who has served on the board that regretted it or felt that their time was wasted. It is a very important role that the members fill to keep this group moving in the the right direction. If you want to give back to a group that is solely designed provide better opportunities to its members, you should serve on the board.

At the 2023 show, Doug Seaman who is currently serving as the Southwest region board member, will rotate off the board. The following year, Clinton Bush of the West region (who is also the board president) and Tim Robb of the North region will be rotating off the board. Please give serious consideration to filling these positions. They are a rewarding opportunity that I am sure you will appreciate for the rest of your life.





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Harris previously introduced the V62-5 with injector mixers for customers who already had an inventory of Victor tips. With the addition of the equal pressure mixer version, regardless of the type of gas being used, customers can be certain that if they use Harris or Victor tips, they have access to the toughest and Harris' best-selling torch on the market: the 62-5.

Designed for demanding environments, the V-Series 62-5 line includes torches for most fuel gases or alternate fuels. They are all equipped with FlashGuard® check valves that prevent the reverse flow of gases for added safety. The products are ideal for high-capacity jobs, thick material cutting, and heating, and are commonly used in applications such as scrap yards, shipyards, rail yards and steel mills. The V62-5 reduces the need for grinding and rework and offers a reduced cost-per-cut and fast preheat times.

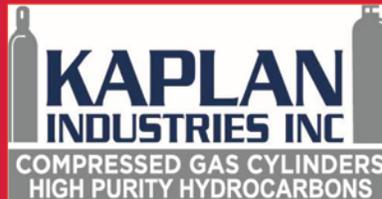
The V62-5 torches can cut materials up to 12 inches (304.8 millimeters) thick and come in lengths from 21 inches to 72 inches (533.4 millimeters to 1,828.8 millimeters), for a wide range of cutting and heating needs. The torches have a forged head and are available in 70, 90 and 180-degree head angles. The lever is made of solid brass which gives each torch a long service life.

Harris torches provide consistent performance, quality and savings benefits that are backed by performance testing. Harris performs flow, leak and flame tests on every torch to ensure high quality and performance. The company's 24-Point Quality Certification covers every step in the manufacturing process from incoming inspection of raw materials and components to assembly to testing.

Information on Harris V-Series® torches can be found at

<https://www.harrisproductsgroup.com/en/Products/hpg-na-modelvseries>.

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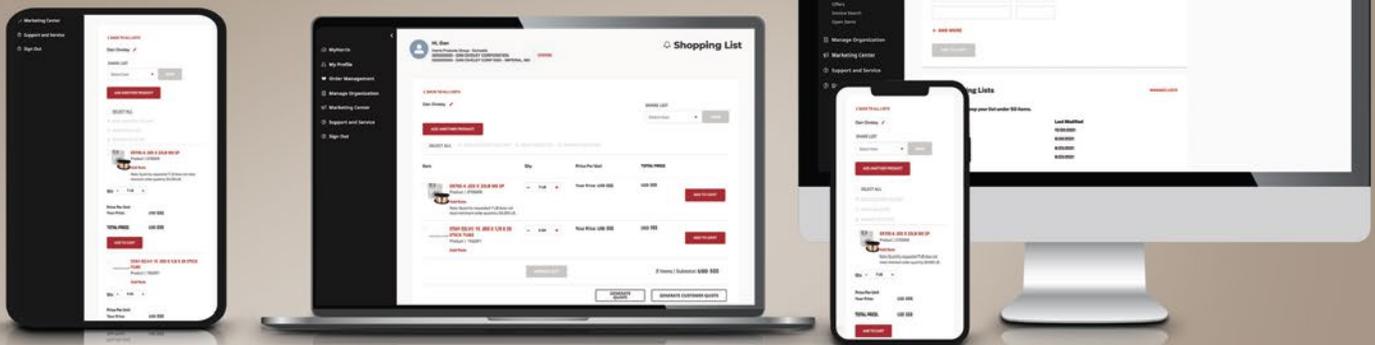
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