

# Role reversal

5 reasons your clients believe they're doing all the work  
By Pamela Schuck

**E**very business owner wants to provide top-notch service, but have you unwittingly created a perception in your customers' minds that they're the ones working hard to do business with you?

Here are five situations that could hurt your company and send your customers running to the competition.

## Reliability

If you promise to return phone calls, does that happen or does the customer have to call your company back, often numerous times? When you market products and ensure availability, are they in stock? If not, do you promise to get the product in, then communicate with the customer?

More times than you may realize, your customer gets the job of finding out if the product is in. While you may offer hassle-free returns, the reality is that the customer is responsible for producing purchase order numbers, receipts and shipping documents to resolve problems that aren't their fault.

Customers want to know what they can count on you for. Tell them, and don't make them work to cash in on your promises.

## Assurance

Don't hold customers responsible for what they don't know. You and your staff should be responsible for product and company knowledge and good listening and problem solving skills.

Be willing to share information and educate customers, but don't make them work to get that information. Instead, offer it by telling them what resources your business can provide them with.

## Responsiveness

Evaluate your turnaround time in answering questions, providing information and solving problems. Do you set and meet deadlines? And, do you treat clients' questions as intrusions or give the perception of being apathetic?

Being responsive is the biggest key in avoiding the customer "work" perception. Be proactive, not reactive — even if you don't know the answers — and don't make clients feel as if they must repeatedly ask questions to get the information they require. Once a client feels neglected, he or she must work to make you respond to their concerns.

At that point, you've lost their trust.

## Empathy

Be genuine in your concern and care for your customers. The phrase, "I don't care what you know until I know that you care" applies here.



Empathy goes a long way in preventing the perception of being overworked and underappreciated. It shows you care about clients and their business. Empathy eases the pain of doing business with you.

## Tangibles

Evaluate physical barriers, requirements, procedures and policies. Take pride in your workplace and instill pride in your employees. Set standards of what your business looks like and how you reflect your professionalism.

Is it easy to navigate your business physically, online and on the phone? How does it look and feel to the customer? Is it hard to find information about a product, track down people or receive service?

An example is your voice mail menu. Do customers have to be prepared to write down their options because your menu is so long and confusing? Tangibles amplify customers' perceptions that they must do an inordinate amount of work to do business with your company.

If you take the time to evaluate your business from top to bottom, you'll determine just how difficult — or easy — it is to do business with you.

Pam Schuck ([pschuck@strivetraining.com](mailto:pschuck@strivetraining.com)) is president of STRIV=E Training, which specializes in motivating customer service excellence for businesses. She can be reached at (330) 273-8790