

May 2008: The Customer Care Edition

## For Great Customer Care ... Put your Trust in your Staff

Many of the most successful businesses create great customer service by adopting one simple idea: the best person to decide what to do is the person dealing with the customer.

Of course, this takes a lot of trust. But the question is, if you don't have a lot of trust in your staff, what are you doing employing them? Most people believe in the business that they work for. And most of those that don't, would like to.

This means, if you give them the resources - and more important, the authority - to make customer service decisions, they will find it motivating and will strengthen their belief in your organisation.

There are other reasons to delegate customer care decisions to the point of customer contact:

- Your customers will see a genuine effort to please them
- Response to enquiries and complaints will be faster
- There will be a clear point of responsibility with fewer hand-offs
- There will be less room for confusion
- Staff will find their jobs more interesting and rewarding and feel a greater sense of respect from the organisation

It's not for nothing that one well-known and well-loved high-street chain gives its staff absolute autonomy to commit over £300 to making a customer happy, no questions asked. If this doesn't sound a lot, this business is Timpsons and their business is repairing shoes and cutting keys. This is one of our favourite businesses and they are not even a client of ours!

Learn More: [Customer Service and Complaint Handling](#) on 6 May at Chilston Park, Lenham

### Customer Complaints? I'm OK

Sometimes customers do complain - and sometimes you will deserve it. We look at what can you do when the mistake you made is minor, but the complaint is a big one.

One tool of basic business psychology points us to what may be going on - the customer thinks they are better than you are. In their mind, they are a good person, cruelly wronged. You, on the other hand, are stupid, malicious, or inadequate... in their mind.

Your customer is saying to themselves:

*"I'm OK; you're not OK"*

The secret to defusing the potential conflict is to show that you too are "OK", by demonstrating that, like them, you recognise that the situation is unacceptable.

This means building rapport, by empathising with their point of view, then demonstrating that you want to solve the problem in a way that is intelligent, well-meaning and capable.

Why do some people fail to deal with conflict effectively? That's simple: they take the other tack and try to prove to the aggrieved customer that the customer is "Not OK", and that they themselves are clearly "OK".

This attempt to get one-up on the customer is doomed to fail. Would you go back to do business with someone who showed that attitude?

Learn More: [Basic Psychology for Business](#) on 14-15 May, [Dealing Effectively with Conflict](#) on 20 May, [Communicate with Confidence](#) on 22 May,

[Assertiveness](#) on 19 June,  
[Influencing and Persuading Skills](#) on 25 June

## Back to Basics

Great customer care demands efficiency of systems to ensure that nothing gets missed. You will need exceptional administration, so never under-estimate the importance of your admin staff, nor of your admin IT.

Ensure that your staff have the skills and tools to do the job you demand of them - then you can safely put your trust in them and focus on the next issue.

Tools and skills include:

- Attend our [Office Management](#) workshop on 14 May.
- [Minute Taking](#) on 29 May
- [Supervisory Management](#) on 27 May
- A strong understanding of the basics of finance and how to use spreadsheets to analyse customer data  
[Finance Essentials](#) on 22 May  
[Finance for Directors and Senior Managers](#) on 17 June  
[Excel for Beginners](#) on 18 June  
[Excel Intermediate level](#) on 15 May
- Database skills to record, track and access customer preferences  
[Access for Beginners](#) on 10 June  
[Access Intermediate level](#) on 14 May
- Presentation skills and PowerPoint to prepare sales and marketing materials  
[Presenting with Impact - Advanced](#) - 21 May  
[PowerPoint for Beginners](#) on 20 May
- The ability to write effective letters, manuals, reports, questionnaires and, dare we say, newsletters  
[Report Writing](#) on 11 June  
[Word for Advanced users](#) on 20 May

## Use the power of your Team

Share team learning and responsibility with regular team checkpoint meetings focused on your customer care.

**Learn More:** [Developing High Performing Teams](#) on 19 June, or [Developing a High Performing Sales Team](#) on 18 June

## Essential Ideas

### *Do you know your "BATNA"*

In our September 2007, "Getting what you want" edition, we introduced some of the key ideas in Roger Fisher and William Ury's 1981, book, "Getting to Yes".

Another powerful idea from that book is the idea of a BATNA. Fisher and Ury counsel to not get too attached to a potential outcome of a negotiation – you may not be able to achieve it. Critically, you must always be able to walk away, and being too attached means you may do a deal that you will later regret; as indeed may your customer. When the latter happens, it is sometimes called "buyer's remorse".

How, Fisher and Ury asked, do you know when to walk away? For this, you need to know your BATNA.

Right up front, before you enter your negotiation, decide what you would do if you were unable to reach agreement. What would be the best alternative outcome? This is your *Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement*, or BATNA.

Then, during the negotiation, if you reach a point where any further concessions leave you worse off than you would be with your BATNA, it is time to walk away. Any further negotiations would simply be about the scale of your losses!

**Learn More:** [Negotiating Skills](#) on 13 May or [Influencing and Persuading Skills](#) on 25 June

### **Managing for Customer Care not a Matter of Luck**

Great customer care needs to be managed by knowing how to assert yourself effectively, manage your time, delegate, give praise and feedback and many of the other skills described in this newsletter. For a great introduction to all of these:

[The Management Programme](#): Only two places remaining on the summer programme, starting on 12 May and continuing on 9 June and 7 July at Chilston Park, Lenham.

[Management Essentials](#) on 10 June at Chilston Park, Lenham.