



# A WEEK IN *Learning*

## ARTICLE

### A DOSE OF THE UNEXPECTED: PROVIDING EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

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We all can relate to experiences of unsatisfactory customers service, which often leaves us feeling frustrated and dissatisfied. We have also been fortunate enough to experience service that exceeds our expectations, leaving us feeling valued and appreciated. But, what truly separates these two experiences? What defines an interaction as bad, good, or excellent?

I recently read the book *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara, former co-owner of Eleven Madison Park. In his book, Guidara emphasizes the importance of providing exceptional customer service and shares how his team's focus on hospitality helped make the restaurant a success. His words helped me remember that no matter where we work, we're all in the service industry - and we have the opportunity to provide excellent service to our customers.

#### Defining Excellent Customer Service

So, what is excellent customer service? Simply put, excellent customer service is exceeding customer expectations, putting ourselves in their shoes, and giving them a dose of the unexpected. Taking a customer-centered approach is critical when defining excellent customer service. Never underestimate the power of going above and beyond expectations and giving customers the very best experience.

#### The 3 P's

To provide excellent customer service, there are three critical qualities to keep in mind, known as the 3 "P's": **Professionalism, Patience, and a People-First Attitude.**



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*- Larry Van Wave*

- 1 PROFESSIONALISM
- 2 PATIENCE
- 3 PEOPLE-FIRST ATTITUDE

**Professionalism** refers to your attitude towards your customers. Even when a customer is upset or being disruptive, it's up to you to diffuse the situation (if possible) and represent the situation in a positive light.

**Patience** means remembering that every customer is unique, and each may respond to a common practice in a way you didn't expect. Therefore, providing excellent service means being creative, flexible, and patient.

Finally, a **People-First Attitude** builds on professionalism and patience. With this attitude in mind, your customer service strategy should reinforce the idea of human connection. In other words, it's about your relationship with the customer.

### A Learning Opportunity

Of course, not all customer service experiences will go well. However, you can use those not-so-great experiences as a learning opportunity. Even if a customer is taking a negative tone or reacting in an over-the-top way, there's usually a valid reason why they're unhappy. Look for that reason and focus on how to solve it so you can prevent similar confrontations in the future. Seeing bad experiences as learning opportunities means learning from the problem to prevent it from arising again with other customers.

### An Ongoing Culture of Customer Service

To encourage a culture of going above and beyond, companies and teams can take steps, like Will Guidara did at his restaurant. During a daily 30-minute morning huddle, he would remind his team of their “why” and encourage them to do something inspiring that day. He would also share experiences outside of the restaurant where he received excellent customer service and discuss how they might incorporate those practices into their workplace.

Providing excellent customer service is an ongoing process that needs continual adjustment and evaluation. If you feel like you haven't perfected it, you are not alone. However, the fact that you want to provide better service should encourage you. By prioritizing the 3 P's and making a conscious effort to ensure that customers feel acknowledged, valued, and respected, you can leave a lasting impact that fosters customer loyalty.

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