

The Mark of a Great School: Great Customer Service

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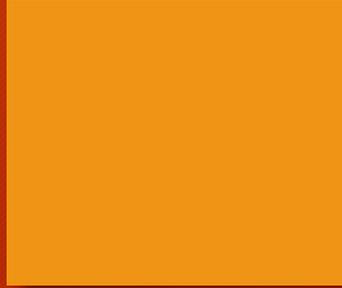
Who could forget Seinfeld's 1995 version of "the Soup Nazi"? He served the best soup on the planet. So good that his customers had to follow his ordering procedure (step into the store, move to the right side, proceed directly to the counter, order without comment, and step to the left) to get what they wanted, or they would hear the dreaded words, "No soup for you!"



Great Schools

Great schools are known by engaged, committed families: the ones who come for the promise of an exceptional educational community and stay because they can't imagine finding anything better.





Satisfied parents won't leave, and they will tell others about the superior experience they've had at your school. The result will be a healthy, sustained growth through a dedicated parent base and positive word-of-mouth - the best form of marketing you can never buy.



Great Customer Service

Great customer service is the backbone of any successful business, big or small. And whether you accept it or not, running a school IS running a business. Your clients (parents, students, board members, and church members) are as critical as any corporation's most important clients—and twice as demanding!

Provide Outstanding Service

The way we serve our students, parents and other constituents can make a huge difference. Make it your goal to deliver outstanding service to these stakeholders. It doesn't always mean they are right; it does mean that we will be proactive and take the initiative in serving them with excellence.



Rules for Great Customer Service

Keep your promises.

Always do what you say you are going to do. Your parents don't care if it's been super crazy at work or if a staff member is out sick. If you made a promise, deliver on that promise. No excuses. Be sure to make reasonable promises though, giving yourself a little "wiggle room," and if you can exceed expectations, do it. Look for ways to make doing business with you easy, removing all unnecessary obstacles.

Train your staff.



Give your staff members the information and power they need to make the small, customer-pleasing decisions. When they can say, “Yes, I can do that for you” instead of, “I don’t know; I’ll have to ask somebody,” your customers will walk away delighted. Immediate satisfaction goes a long way to providing great customer service! It’s also important to emphasize to your “front desk” person that his/her critical role is your “face” to the community. Hint: Hire happy people for these critical positions. You can train for job skills, but it’s difficult to train for a pleasant disposition.

Answer the phone.

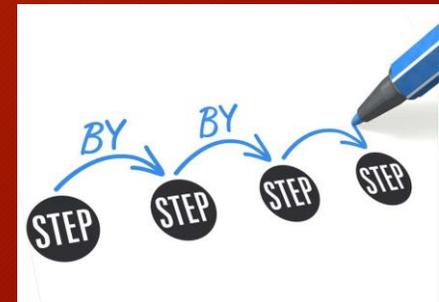


When parents call, they want to hear the voice of a live person on the other end of the phone. If possible, when you are not available, make sure your calls transfer to somebody who will answer the phone. If that isn't possible, be sure to return your phone messages as soon as you are able.

Have a standard that all phone messages will be returned within 24 hours.

Help customers understand your processes.

The easiest and most efficient processes in the world won't do anybody any good if your parents become frustrated or angry because nobody has explained how things work. Taking a little time upfront to explain how the process will work going forward will go a long way toward understanding and will ensure that the agenda is only secondary to the more important, human element of your Christian school.



Deal with complaints.



Nobody likes hearing complaints, and hopefully, they are few and far between, but since they are a reality, it's important not to shrug them off or worse, take offense. Deal with problems immediately, and let parents know what you have done to fix the problem. When something goes wrong, apologize. It's easy, and it makes everybody happy. Remember, great school customer service, no matter the situation, means great school public relations.



Listen.

Quit talking. Find out what the student or parent needs, and then see if you can offer ways to help. Always look for ways to meet your customers' needs—but you can do that only when you know what they are (no assumptions). When they have a reasonable request, tell them what you can do to help. By truly listening and finding out what they need, you will be able to improve your services for them and other families just like them.

More

- A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page on your website can't be overstated as a great customer support tool. Take the information you get from all your school customer service experiences, and put the most commonly asked questions, along with their solutions, right on your school websites.
- Speaking of websites, which are often your first line of customer service, you need to make your content, information, and news easy to find and use. Today 40-75% of parents are using their mobile device to access your website.
- “Listen” to your customers by providing a periodic satisfaction survey. This will help you take the pulse of your school and show parents you care about striving to make them happy.

So What

So, no matter how great your product (your school, teachers, programs, facilities, technology, etc.) is, the prideful “Soup Nazi” mentality only works in a fictional world. Give your customers the kind of great customer service they deserve, and soon you’ll have a whole community of raging fans touting you and your school’s greatness.

