



What is excellent customer service?

I talk about excellent customer service every single day, whether with staff, the membership I serve or on-line. I write the words *excellent customer service* maybe five times per day, every day, but what does it really mean?

A few weeks ago, I was at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign talking to library science students (something I really love doing!), and they asked me “How would you define excellent customer service?” I rambled off some oblique answer, but on the drive home, I began to really formulate the “excellent” answer. Here goes, excellent customer service is:

1. **Reliable.** This is the library’s hallmark and what differentiates us from all others. Libraries are perceived as reliable, authentic, and dependable. To maintain that exalted position, every single customer interaction must be the very best.
2. **Timely.** In an age of instant gratification, slow service is unacceptable. Our customers want and deserve service now. If not, they will simply go somewhere else! Saying “I will get back to you tomorrow” is no longer an option. Excellent customer service is now!
3. Excellent customer service is **personalized**. The door is open for better communication when staff smile, and remember a customer’s name or a previous encounter. Personalized service differentiates libraries from the bank or the drivers’ license bureau!
4. **Memorable.** Simply ask yourself if you would recommend this service to your mom. Memorable service keeps our customers returning, and the returning customer keeps us in business. It’s that simple!

At Alliance, we have quantified excellent customer service with our Customer Service Charter (<http://www.alliancelibrarysystem.com/aboutUs1/ALS%20VisionMissionValuesStatement2008.pdf>). The HR Department teaches the charter to new staff during their orientation, and we review it yearly with all staff. Excellent customer service is reliable, timely, personalized and memorable it is an attitude, requiring our constant vigilance. We are only as good as our last customer interaction!

Kitty Pope
kpope@alliancelibrarysystem.com

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