

Expert Insights



Six Crucial Behaviors for Customer-Facing Employees

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Two-thirds of business from existing accounts and one-third from new accounts is the common balance.

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You can't afford not to build customer loyalty.

In both good times and bad the lifetime value of a customer can be exponentially greater than the value of a series of single transactions from one-time customers. In this era of social networking, it only takes one Tweet or Facebook status update to seriously damage a company's reputation.

One bad customer experience can cost you that customer for life. Hospitality, travel, retail, healthcare, and financial services are especially prone to losing customers who have a negative experience. Think about these situations from the perspective of a customer. It doesn't take much for a customer to decide that you and your company aren't worth his time, effort, or money.

Profiles International found that assessing core personality traits combined with a standardized set of skill measures provides clear indicators of probable success in a customer-facing role. Profiles was founded in 1991, and instantly began developing the Customer Service Knowledge Scale for the largest cable television provider in the US to successfully identify ideal job candidates for call centers, customer service departments, help-desks and technical representatives. This research has been continually refined over the past 22 years, with thousands of clients and across hundreds of industries. **This report identifies and explains the core behaviors of your [customer-facing employees](#) that make the biggest difference for your business. They are:**

1. Trust
2. Tact
3. Empathy
4. Conformity
5. Focus
6. Flexibility

Six Crucial Behaviors for Customer-Facing Employees

1. Trust



Trusting individuals tend to believe that the motives of others are honorable.

It's easy for your people to become defensive when they're presented with problems, especially when it seems that the person presenting the problem has a hidden agenda. For example, a hotel employee might be cynical about a guest who calls to complain about his room and demands an upgrade to an executive suite. Is this a real problem? Is this a high-maintenance guest who feels entitled to only the best? Or is this person a freeloader? This cynicism is a normal reaction, but **a particularly untrusting employee will focus on the validity of the problem rather than a solution that is amenable to all parties involved.**

- People with low levels of trust are often described as wary, vigilant, or skeptical.
- Those with high levels of trust are often described as unquestioning, uncritical, or optimistic.

The optimal degree of trustworthiness depends on your business, but naiveté is never optimal. For example, an IRS agent will probably be less trusting than the front desk clerk of a Ritz-Carlton hotel. But you jeopardize your chance to build long-term, loyal customers if you assume from the outset that their motives are not honorable.

Did you know?

Profiles International's **Customer Service Profile** assessment provides insight into six behavioral characteristics including trust to predict successful job fit. The CSP is available in a general assessment as well as 4 different industry styles - hospitality, health care, financial services and retail.

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2. Tact



How you say something to a customer can be just as important as what you say.

Your customers don't know what they don't know, and they may make incorrect assumptions about what they need or how something works. They also don't want to feel stupid and will likely be offended if your customer-facing people make a big deal about their incorrect assumptions. This is common in technology and healthcare fields that may require specialized technical knowledge.

- **Tactful people tend to state their positions without offending others and are often described as discreet, diplomatic or restrained.**
- **Less tactful people are often described as direct, obvious or forthright.**

The bottom line is that how you say something to a customer can be just as important as what you say, especially in an emotionally charged situation.

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3. Empathy



Customers need to feel that someone cares about their experience.

Customers like to feel liked, and they get turned off very quickly when they sense that you don't care about the pain they're feeling. Even if you can't help them because the situation is beyond your control, acknowledge that you understand both the situation and their frustration.

- **People with high levels of empathy tend to understand others' feelings and are often described as understanding, compassionate, or sensitive.**
- **People with low levels of empathy are often described as detached, indifferent or distant.**

A good example is a delayed flight caused by inclement weather. Even though the airline is not technically at fault, travelers appreciate it when the airline employees demonstrate that they care and take reasonable measures to offer guidance or rebook the flight. On the other hand, if travelers feel that no one from the airline cares about the predicament, they will be even more upset and the bad memories will linger even longer.

Did you know?

While empathy can be learned, some people have greater natural empathy tendencies than others. The **Customer Service Profile** gives you clear objective data showing a person's empathy levels along with other core behaviors essential to your customer service success.

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4. Conformity



The optimal degree of conformity for your customer-facing people really depends on your business.

The key is understanding your customers' objectives and expectations, and then aligning your people with your customers.

The Ritz-Carlton is famous for empowering its frontline people to make good decisions that allow them to deliver exceptional experiences for customers. This is probably a good thing given their ultra-luxury market segment.

- **People with high levels of conformity have a strong tendency to comply with the rules and with those in authority.** They are often described as traditional, compliant, or conventional.
- **People with low levels of conformity are often described as inventive, free-spirited, or independent.**

Some positions also require high conformity due to legal, regulatory and safety requirements. In this case, **it is best to balance the need to conform with high empathy and tact** since it is unlikely that the service provider will be able to bend the rules. Your customer-facing people should be aware of the stress this places on the customer, and they should let the customer know that they feel his or her pain.

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5. Focus



Customer service is about relentless focus.

Obviously, no customer wants the person serving her to be distracted or preoccupied. Ever go to the local mall and try to get help from a teenager focused more on texting her friends than helping you find what you're looking for?

On the other hand, being too focused can be a bad thing. Have you ever asked an innocent question out of curiosity and then found yourself stuck for an eternity while a customer support person hunts endlessly for an answer? This person is likely so focused on getting the answer that he doesn't realize that you really don't care that much about it and would rather not wait for an answer to an inessential question. Be sure your people understand the degree of focus required for the job.

- **Highly focused people tend to stay on task** regardless of distractions, and they are often described as attentive, purposeful, or efficient.
- **People with little ability to focus are often described as distractible, preoccupied, or inefficient.** They may have a hard time working in an environment with many distractions such as a bullpen-type call center.

“ Because a world-class customer-service experience is the foundation of any successful operation, relentless focus on customer service predetermines the ultimate success of any operation. If the focus on customer service is lost, then employees begin to believe that the organization isn't really committed to its customer-service goals or any of its other programs, initiatives, or strategies. —*Business Week.com, January 2009* ”

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6. Flexibility



Companies that provide the best service think in terms of the customer, and this requires employee willingness and flexibility.

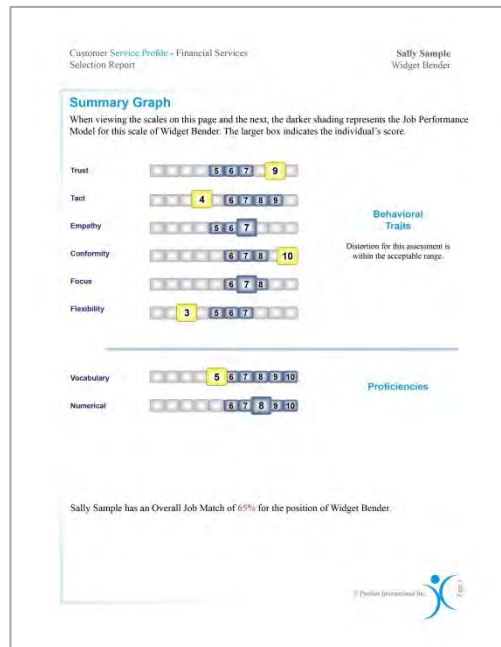
Highly flexible people can be creative problem solvers, but they risk becoming bored if the problems they are trying to solve are routine or repetitious. They may also try to overcomplicate simple issues just so they can add variety to their assignments.

On the other hand, It's easy to assume that your customer-facing employees should be flexible in order to accommodate customer needs, but this isn't always the case. Less flexible people often prefer routine or repetitious tasks that change little over time. New methods or routines can overwhelm them. They are often better suited for customer interactions that involve routine tasks with clearly defined rules and procedures.

- **Less flexible people are often described as uncompromising, rigid, or cautious.**
- **Highly flexible people tend to explore new approaches** to doing things, and they are often described as adaptable, accepting, and open-minded.

The key here is to **match the core behaviors of the individual to the actual job** that he will be performing.

Using the **Customer Service Profile** to determine which behaviors and strengths are most in line with your organizations customer service initiatives **increases the likelihood of success** for your customer service employees and your organization.



The customer's experience influences customer's loyalty.

Skills can be learned by employees willing to put forth the effort, but our personalities and core behaviors are difficult to change. That's why we encourage our clients to carefully consider how well an employee's core behaviors fit with the actual job he or she will be performing.

Understand your people and replicate your top performers.

- Identify those who excel in their role and then use assessments to find out what makes them tick
- Create a model against which you can match potential employees interested in the same job
- Gain insight as to where employees may be at risk
- Offer specific coaching tips and development suggestions

It is also important to survey your customers to learn first-hand how committed they are and how you can [build customer loyalty](#). Having insight into your customer's perception of your relationship allows you to steer strategic business efforts and initiatives of the account team.

“ Start with good people who are right for the job; train and motivate them; give them opportunity for advancement; and your organization will succeed. ”
—J.W. Marriott



Need to improve your customer loyalty? Profiles International has helped thousands of organizations retain customers, build extreme Loyalty and generate more predictable revenue streams.

Summary: Six Crucial Behaviors for Customer-Facing Employees

Even if the employee has the right skill set and experience, his odds of being successful and remaining on the job are low if his core behaviors and tendencies do not line up with those needed for success in that particular role. This is especially true for customer-facing roles in which your frontline employees act as extensions of your brand and heavily influence the customer experience.

These are the core behaviors of your customer-facing employees people that make the biggest difference for your business.

1. **Trust** – trusting individuals tend to believe that the motives of others are honorable.
2. **Tact** – tactful people tend to state their positions without offending others and are often seen as discreet and diplomatic.
3. **Empathy** – people with high levels of empathy tend to understand the feelings of others and convey understanding and compassion.
4. **Conformity** – people with high levels of conformity have a strong tendency to comply with the rules and those in authority.
5. **Focus** – highly focused people tend to stay on task regardless of distractions and are often attentive and purposeful with customers.
6. **Flexibility** – people who are highly flexible tend to explore new approaches to doing things and are seen as adaptable, accepting and open-minded.

imagine great people™

Profiles International – Who We Are

Profiles International is the best source for talent management solutions, with over 20 years' experience and more than 40,000 clients in over 120 countries. Our data-driven talent management solutions – built on complex behavioral science, yet simple to administer and read – help you find the right people, shape them into a winning team, and lead them to their full potential.

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