



# CUSTOMER SERVICE Rules!

52 ways to create a customer-centric business

by **DON GALLEGOS**

illustrated by **STEVE HICKNER**

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**BRIGANTINE MEDIA**

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## The customer is not always right.

WE'VE HEARD IT over and over—"The customer is always right." Guess what? The customer is NOT always right—but he or she is always the customer.

Employees want to protect the company and they don't want to let a customer "get away" with anything. They spend too much time thinking about who is right and who is wrong in a situation.

When they tell me the customer is wrong, I say, "So what? Just take care of the customer and move on."

Our supermarkets rented videos and we charged a late fee if the customer was late bringing back a tape. I received a letter from a customer who said his children had rented two videos, but he and his wife didn't realize that they had done so. He asked the head clerk at the store if she could she do anything about the ten dollar charge, because it wasn't his fault.

The head clerk, thinking she was doing a good job of providing customer service, said, “How about five dollars?” This made the customer even angrier, and prompted his letter to the president about how cheap we were. The next day, the manager went to the customer’s house with five dollars and a gift certificate as an apology to being so insensitive to his problem.

I explained to the clerk that we don’t make money on late charges—we make money renting videos. “When a customer brings back a video, be happy. Now we can rent it again. Even though the customer is wrong and he does owe ten dollars, he’s mad. When a customer is obviously mad about late charges, waive the charge—not all late charges, just when the customer is mad. We want him to keep shopping with us.”

The goal is to win the *customer*—not the argument.

## Don't ask for the receipt.

MOST COMPANIES WANT a receipt for an item a customer brings back for a refund. I don't think that is necessary.

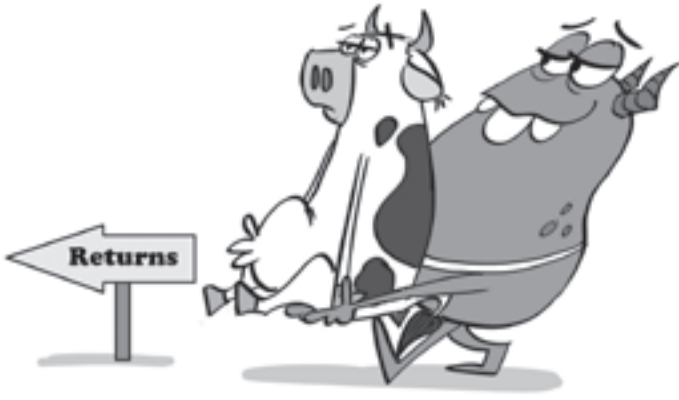
It doesn't really matter when the customer bought the item, or even if the customer bought the item somewhere else. If *you* give the customer the money back, you've gained that customer for life.

Sure, a few customers will take advantage, but ninety-eight percent of customers are honest. Why have a policy to "catch" the two percent of cheaters? A customer will be delighted to buy from you, knowing that they can return anything with no questions asked.

The end result when you don't ask for the receipt—more business and more profit.



## RULE 3



### Let customers bring back an item you don't stock.

IF A CUSTOMER brings back an item you don't stock, don't send them back to the store where they originally purchased it. Take back the item, give the refund, and keep the customer in *your* store.

After you give the refund, you can take it back to the store where they originally purchased the item, or put it on your shelf and sell it.

A customer came to the courtesy desk of King Soopers and set down a carton of milk that was Safeway's private label. Immediately, the customer realized she wasn't in Safeway and said, "I'm sorry, I'm in the wrong store." The clerk asked what was wrong with the milk. The customer replied, "It's sour—but it's Safeway's milk." The clerk said, "That's okay, just



go back and help yourself to one of ours.”

Now, that is a clerk who understands customer service! And you can bet the customer told all her friends about it.

RULE  
4

## A store credit is not a refund.

I WAS SHOPPING at a lovely clothing store for a gift for my wife. I had about four hundred dollars worth of clothes on the counter. As the clerk was ringing it up, I noticed a sign that said, “Refunds are for store credit only.” I asked the clerk, “If my wife doesn’t like what I purchased, she can’t get a refund, only a store credit?” The clerk said, “Yes, that is our policy.” I told her to tear up the charge—I didn’t want the items I just purchased.

If she didn’t like what I chose, there might not have been something else in the store that she wanted. It’s hard to understand why some businesses



have such anti-customer policies. When you make a company policy, first think: “Will this work for the customer?”

PS: That exclusive dress shop is now out of business. And they earned it.

## RULE 5

### Give more refund than the customer expects.

WITH A REFUND or exchange, customers rarely ask for more than a company is willing to give them. People want satisfaction. That's the goal of a refund or an exchange.

Give the customer a little more than she asks for. If a customer wants to exchange a product, give her the product she wants, and add a small gift certificate as an apology for her inconvenience.

She won't expect it, and she'll be delighted with the outcome of the transaction. It will set you apart from your competition.

