A Practical Guide On How To Win Customers With Empathy

by Kelechi Okeke - Wednesday, January 30, 2019


Solving a customer's problem is an integral part of customer service, but when it comes to customer satisfaction, fixing the problem is never enough. This is because, in order to deliver a wholesome customer experience, the customer needs to feel heard, understood and valued.

Empathy plays an important role in the business of rendering services, it is what helps you relate to customers and envision their situation from individual perspectives. Empathy & sympathy are very often confused by people to mean the same thing, but they are different.
# Empathy vs Sympathy: The Differences

Is there a difference between empathy and sympathy? People often confuse the two words and they are usually used in similar contexts. This infographic highlights 3 important differences between these words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sympathy</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Older Word</td>
<td>Recent Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The term Sympathy is the older of the two terms. By the mid-1500s it had already made its way into English language</td>
<td>Empathy is the newer of both words and first appeared in English in 1909 when it was translated by Edward Bradford Titchener from the German ‘Zapf Neu’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. About Showing Care or Concern</td>
<td>About Sharing Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A feeling of care and concern for someone, accompanied by a wish to see him better off or happier.</td>
<td>The ability to recognize and share the emotions of another person. It involves seeing someone else’s situation from his perspective and sharing his emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does Not Require Imagination</td>
<td>Requires Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy does not require imagination, you only have to feel concern for what the other person is experiencing.</td>
<td>Empathy requires some imagination to allow an individual project their personality into understanding what the other person is experiencing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Empathy and Sympathy are similar words but they are not the same. The ability to express sympathy or empathy is important when dealing with people. When things go wrong sometimes it boils down to knowing the difference between the two words.

Sources
- [https://www.grammar.com/blog/empathetic/](https://www.grammar.com/blog/empathetic/)
- [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/empathy-vs-sympathy](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/empathy-vs-sympathy)
- [https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/-empathy-vs-sympathy](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/-empathy-vs-sympathy)
Empathy refers to the ability of a person to identify, understand and share the feelings of another. It empowers us to connect with other people on a deep, intuitive level - to know and understand what they want and need – and why.

**Why is Empathy Important?**

Empathy is important in calming the emotions of a disgruntled Customer because when you empathize you know how you’d relate to the particular situation and how you’d feel about it, this makes it easier to say the right words to the aggrieved customer.

It helps businesses develop and market products and services that cater to the needs of the customers. This is usually a result of observing how customers use the products and services and listening to them talk about features and capabilities they need from these products.

Companies that don’t look at things from the perspective of their customers and competitors risk being disrupted.

https://youtu.be/baHrcC8B4WM
Video by Dr Helen Riess on the Power of Empathy

**How To Win Customers With Empathy**

Empathy makes it possible to increase customer satisfaction, even after a negative experience. No matter how a customer is feeling, you can win back their confidence and loyalty by empathizing with them. Here are four steps to winning life-long customers with empathy.

1. Make Eye Contact
Eye contact makes us more socially aware and empathetic and also plays an important role in face-to-face communication. You can communicate with your eyes and never say a word. Our eyes show emotion and they act as a spotlight for our attention.

People will naturally direct their gaze to whatever attracts their attention, and they will keep it there as long as it holds their attention. When you look directly at someone you make them the centre of your attention momentarily. This subconsciously says to the person that they are important and you value what they have to say.

Both customers and colleagues will see you in a more positive light when you start **listening with your eyes**. People who make higher levels of eye contact with others are perceived as being:

- More qualified, skilled, competent, and valuable
- More trustworthy, honest, and reliable
- More confident and emotionally stable

Make eye contact with customers whenever you are interacting with them and give them your full attention. This means putting your phone away, letting go of your keyboard and not letting anything distract you.

2. Listen Actively

There's a big difference between hearing and active listening. Hearing someone speak entails standing or sitting quietly without responding to what the speaker is saying.

Active listening, on the other hand, is different. It requires that you concentrate, understand and respond to what the speaker is saying with your mind and body. This sort of listening is all about **understanding**
the person who's talking to you.

_How good are you at listening? Take this quiz to find out._

The purpose of active listening is to encourage the speaker(s) to put their total focus and attention on themselves and how they feel. When you listen to people actively, you will often find that most people will open up and offer even more information than they normally would if you were merely listening.

Being an active listener involves not only paying active attention but also communicating to the speaker that you are listening and understand their message. You can do this via body language, asking questions when you're not clear on the message and paraphrasing to show that you remember what he or she actually said.

https://youtu.be/oWe_ogA5YCU

Your ability to listen actively as a customer service professional will open up numerous opportunities to win raving, life-long customers.

3. See Things From Their Perspective

Stepping outside your own subjective view and seeing things from another's perspective empowers you to consider all sides of a particular situation.

Your ability to weigh a situation from the customers' perspective gives you a better understanding of what needs to be done to help the customer meet his/her goal.

_When you know where the other person is coming from, that knowledge is power. Without it, you'll never get to the real issue—and as you've probably heard me say before, 50 percent of the solution to any problem lies in defining it. Once you've figured that out, you're halfway home. But you can't get there until you flip the pancake._

_Dr. Phillip C. McGraw_
As a customer service professional, your ability to identify a customer’s emotional need or state, understand the reasons behind this state, and respond to it effectively and appropriately will help you win the trust and loyalty of a lot of customers.

**4. Take Responsibility**

It is not enough to pay attention to the customer, listen to their problems, understand their point of view and then do nothing about the situation. Take ownership of the situation especially if it is a complaint. It might take some courage to accept responsibility for something that is not your fault.

According to research by The Belding Group, the primary driver of “Wow” experiences are employees taking ownership of situations. Conversely, the primary driver of negative “Wow” experiences is the perception of a conspicuous absence, or unwillingness, of an employee taking ownership of a situation.

Although customers will feel good about interacting with a service rep who paid attention to their concerns and understood them perfectly, they would feel much better knowing that the service rep has taken the responsibility of fixing their problem!

*Empathy is one of the most important skills a customer service professional can possess. With it, you can*
understand how you’d feel in a particular situation, which makes it easier to say the right words to an aggrieved customer.

This insight helps you do your job in a manner that shows the customers that you genuinely care about their plight. Mastering empathy might feel difficult at first, but like any other skill, it becomes easier and easier with practice.

If you would like to learn more about communicating with empathy and applying emotional intelligence in your career. Check out this detailed online course about Using Emotional Intelligence on the Job