

## **Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)**

**Topic: Customer Care**

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### **WELCOME**

During a slow economy, perhaps the words “Customer Care” or customer service are on your agenda (or should be on your agenda). Surveys and research tell us that it is more expensive to acquire NEW customers than it is to turn existing customers into repeat customers.

So read on if the idea of improving customer service is important.  
Read on if you want examples of what other companies are doing.  
Read on if you want to improve your own customer service.

And please press the “Forward” button if you find the newsletter of service. I love receiving your compliments and comments and if you find the ideas valuable, please send them onto an associate, colleague, or client. We will never sell our subscriber base and with your help, we will continue to grow. Thanks and take care!

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#### **1. ON MY AGENDA?**

Why might the issue of customer care be on your agenda (or should be on your agenda)? Here are some reasons to put Customer Care on your next meeting agenda:

First, consider that in a recessionary economy as the U.S. is experiencing today, customer service is a critical way to differentiate your service AND keep existing customers.

Secondly, a culture of customer care cannot be built through email or through a memo. Communicating the importance, the value and the need for customer care is best accomplished in face-to-face meetings.

Thirdly, in service industries, as many of us are employed, the “people” are often indistinguishable from the “service”. Leonard Berry, customer service guru, states, “Sustaining the skilled actions, personal innovation, and emotional commitment of people in service business as times passes is a tall order. The quality of machine-produced products is far less dependent on the actions, creativity and commitment of individual employees than the quality of people produced products. In services performed directly for the customer, such as retailing, education, health care and transportation, the service is inseparable from the people performing it.” Read more in [Discovering the Soul of Service](#)

Addressing emotional commitment and personal innovation is optimally delivered in a face-to-face meeting.

Fourth, customer service crosses organizational boundaries and should be part of every employee’s mantra from senior executives to people within the company who never see a customer. “We’ve got to back to the fundamental issue and that is: We all work first for the customer,” said Louis Gerstner Chairman and CEO of IBM. How can you get everyone pulling in the same direction except by getting them all in the same room?

Fifth, well-executed meetings that give your employees what they want and need are invaluable for retention and YES for insuring that these same employees put on a happy face for customers. Employees who don’t feel valued or respected, tend to treat customers the same way.

Finally, customer service is a requirement to stay competitive. Among the plethora of [The Complete Idiot’s Guide to....](#) and [Dummies](#) books, yes, there is one on Customer Service. And the authors, Ron Karr and Don Blohowiak, state it quite bluntly when they write, “Those who perform good service might survive. Everyone else is doomed. And we are not exaggerating.” [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Great Customer Service](#)

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## **2. SHOW IT WITH PRIDE**

Your commitment to customer care can be shown in a multiplicity of ways including internal meetings and various types of customers meetings including:

- Customer feedback sessions
- Product Development/Input using customer feedback
- Customer roundtables
- Customer events

An example from [1001 Ways to Keep Customers Coming Back](#) by Donna Greiner and Theodore Kinni is Rosenbluth International, the travel agency. The company holds joint strategy sessions with its customers. “From those sessions, we gain a clear understanding of where each of our clients is headed, so we can ensure that we have the right resources to be where they need us in the future.” says CEO Hal Rosenbluth.

The Timken Company hosts monthly visitor's days for its customers. Customers are invited to presentations, shop-floor demonstrations and luncheon discussions. All levels of Timken employees participate giving customers direct access to both decision-makers and the folks who make the products.

Coldwell Banker Relocation Services (CBRS) was cited as a company providing top-notch customer service in Arthur Andersen's book, [Best Practices Building your Business with Customer-Focused Solutions](#). One thing they do is host meetings yearly with the company's national advisory board, which comprises nine representatives from CBRS's top clients. These meetings afford the management team an opportunity to discuss industry trends and their services as well as brainstorm about needs that their CBRS clients have in the immediate future.

A study by the American Productivity & Quality Center examined the characteristics of customer-centric organizations. One of the studies findings is that "Customer-centric companies interact with customer constantly because they understand how quickly the requirements of a customer, segment or marketplace can change. Without real-time communication, a company can lose critical intelligence and customer loyalty."

While the study did not define "real-time" communication, you can be sure that it intended, along with contacts between sales reps and the customer, structured customer events such as the ones described above.

One more final way to bring a customer focused culture into your organization – hold a meeting with organizations outside your industry that you admire. You can often learn more about improving your own organization by looking at untypical companies for similarities and differences in their handling of customer care. Charles Schwab, the discount brokerage, studies organizations like Home Depot, Wal-Mart and Merry Maids to discover ways to improve their own organization.

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### **3. WHAT KILLS SERVICE?**

Why service is bad. Here are the top 5 reasons from [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Great Customer Service](#):

They don't believe that giving good service is really expected by management. They don't know who to give good service

They aren't service-oriented people (and really should not be in a service job)

Your organization is not set up to support providing good service.

Your organization treats its employees with little respect. Employees who don't feel valued or respect, tend to treat customers the same way.

The Complete Idiots Guide to Great Customer Service

Building a service culture is very much in the people and in the details. [Be Our Guest](#) Perfecting the Art of Customer Service speaks about the Disney approach. People, pixie dust and the details are much of the story.

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#### **4. WHO KILLS CUSTOMERS?**

That very question is addressed in a new On Track training mystery game entitled, “Who Killed the Customer?” As a distributor for On Track training programs, we are pleased to announce that we have a new solution available for your next upcoming meeting or event.

Perfect for cross functional groups like customer service, product management and sales, or even groups that serve internal customers, this training simulation is sure to get people involved in and excited about customer care.

Who Killed The Customer? is an innovative experiential learning program that takes the "mystery" out of what constitutes exceptional customer service. Participants are part of an archeological dig at an ancient city where they uncover a long-ago crime. As they solve the crime, they encounter clues that lead them to realize that even thousands of years ago, serving the customer well meant the difference between success and disaster. Who Killed The Customer? will give participants insights into:

Sweating the Details - making sure that the small things are taken care of, since these are the things that can erode a customer relationship

Standing in the Customer's Shoes - seeing service and your company from the customer's perspective to gain greater appreciation for the customer's needs

Exceeding Expectations - understanding that to be truly customer-focused, expectations must be not only met, but exceeded

Magic Moments - realizing that each contact with the customer is a chance to build and reinforce the relationship the customer has with your company, no matter how unimportant each contact appears to be  
Handling Complaints - seeing that a complaint is actually an opportunity to strengthen the customer/company relationship; each complaint if handled properly will create a more loyal customer

Problem Solving - learning that customers look for suppliers who take the initiative to solve problems, then reward those suppliers with loyalty and increased business

Responsibility/Accountability - taking charge of a customer issue and seeing it through from beginning to end, so that the customer is fully comfortable with the results

Making and Keeping Commitments - saying what you'll do and doing what you say for the customer

So let us help you with the details and the people side of building a customer service culture. For more information on Who Killed the Customer follow this link to the On Track website ([www.ontrackusa.com](http://www.ontrackusa.com)).

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## **5. FREEBIES & TIDBITS**

Saying in China

“To open a business is very easy, to keep it open is very difficult”

From 1to1, a Customer Relationship Management publication, comes a report of how a Wyndham hotel has introduced a wireless check-in service. Guests arriving at the Wyndham Dallas Market Center are greeted curbside and asked for their name and a credit card. The hotel attendant then uses a wireless, handheld device to obtain credit-card authorization, record the guest’s signature and program a room key. Wireless printers also print the itemized statement when it comes time to check out.

All of this results in reduced wait times at the front desk and a simplified, seamless registration and checkout process. (Reported in 1to1, May 2001)

Plan ahead. (Sorry that my timing is off, but do plan ahead for next year) National Customer Service week is always the first full week of October (duly designated by Congress in 1992)

And if you want to explore customer service more, check out these two web-sites: International Customer Service Association ([www.iaca.com](http://www.iaca.com)) and a website with Best Practices ([www.arthurandersen.com/bestpractices](http://www.arthurandersen.com/bestpractices))

Or other books on the topic of Customer Care can be found by clicking here [November Customer Care](#)

Finally, for a smattering of intelligence on the topic of COMPLAINTS, send me an email with the word “Complaining” in the subject line, and I will send you some great information and ideas on the topic.

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## **6. T.I.M.E. GONE BY**

Past issues of T.I.M.E. can be downloaded as a MS Word document. Here is an index of topics and “freebies” offered in the past:

May 2000: Teambuilding and (freebie) New York Times reprint and summary on why teambuilding programs miss the mark. [May](#)

June 2000: Green Meetings and (freebie) list of books that have 20-30 minute exercises for meetings and events. [June](#)

July 2000: American (Values) and (freebie) Meeting Analysis, a 1-page document that will outline the scope and needs analysis for your next meeting. [July](#)

August 2000: Minimum/Minimal Meetings and (freebie) Web Winners (web resources to make you and your meetings more productive). [August](#)

October 2000: Evaluations and (freebie) sample evaluation questions. [October](#)

November 2000: Politics and (freebie) on-line experiences. [November](#)

December 2000: Toys and (freebie) brainstorming ideas. [December](#)

January 2001: Sales, Award Presentations and (freebie) sales tips. [January](#)

February 2001: Change, Change Management and Communicating change and (freebie) Change Bombs (reasons change management fails). [February](#)

March 2001: Open Space Technology. [March](#)

April 2001: Adult Learning Styles and (freebie) Trade Show Timeline [April 2001](#)

May 2001: Trade Shows and (freebie) Trade Show timeline [May 2001](#)

June 2001: Emotional Intelligence and (freebie) EI quiz [June 2001](#)

July 2001: Presentation Skills and (freebie) Speaker Introductions [July 2001](#)

August 2001: Ice Breakers and (freebie) Resource List [August 2001](#)

September 2001: Facilitation and (freebie) Problem Personalities in a Meeting [September 2001](#)

October 2001: Humor and (freebie) The Benefits of Laughter [October 2001](#)

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## **7. FUTURE T.I.M.E.**

If you have an upcoming meeting which would benefit from some customer-centric ideas, contact Sue to schedule Who Killed the Customer?, or a teambuilding activity so people in your organization “fight” the competition instead of each other. Or Sue would be happy to design a customized program for you.

For more ideas and information contact Sue directly at SEAL Inc., 1415 N. Salem Blvd., Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004-4545 or at 847.394.9857.

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