
Going For Gold In Customer Service

by [Steve Brown](#)

Winter sports enthusiasts are getting ready for The Sochi 2014 Olympic Games starting in early Feb. Curling, ice hockey, luge, skating and skiing are just a few of the main events Olympiads and their fans are gearing up for.

Of course, not everyone will come home from the Games with a medal. But everyone can be a winner in the proverbial sense by exercising the golden rules of good sportsmanship. Olympians are known for playing fair, following the rules, respecting the judgment of officials and treating opponents with respect.

Against this backdrop, we thought banks might enjoy a refresher course on the golden rules of how to provide outstanding service. While you may laugh given the governmental issues around the rollout of Obamacare, we took a look at some suggestions from [HowTo.gov](#). This site seeks to help agencies of the federal government deliver a great customer experience and believe it or not it makes some good points.

Step #1 according to the site is to create a set of customer service principles that drive you to serve your customers effectively. These can include speed, quality and customer satisfaction for example.

Step #2 is to measure how well you stack up against the values you seek to exemplify.

Step #3 is to focus on simple strategies, starting with the mantra: do unto others as you would have them do to you. Every interaction you have with customers should be from the vantage point of how you'd want to be treated.

Step #4 is not to try to be all things to all people but to figure out what's most important to your customers and focus on doing those things well. Then, from time to time, take a step back and make sure you measure quantitatively how well you are meeting customers' expectations.

Step #5 is to remember that smiling goes hand in hand with good customer service. As with most things, customers tend to respond better when the person on the other side of the phone or desk is flashing those pearly whites and is being personable.

That brings us to another point. Part of providing good customer service today involves making sure your website is a user-friendly place where customers can learn what they need to know about you. Many customers and prospects are more likely to look for information on their smartphones or tablets than they are to pick up the phone. Make sure you give them what they need in an easy-to-access way.

Today, messing up with respect to customer service has the potential to reverberate in a really big and bad way. With websites like [MyBankTracker.com](#), visitors can easily access information about the most highly-acclaimed banks, using a rating system to measure how they are stacking up. What's more, visitors can read actual customer reviews about banks, in which people share their personal consumer experience. Fair or not, prospective customers could be using these reviews to decide whether or not to give your bank business.

When things go wrong, as they inevitably can, banks should seek every opportunity to learn from mistakes and continually improve customer service. As with the Olympics, practicing good customer service skills leads to more satisfaction and new opportunities. When it comes to customer service, banks shouldn't settle for bronze or silver, but always go for the gold.

BANK NEWS

Regulatory Warning

Recent Fed communications indicate regulators will be looking more closely at underwriting and pricing decisions at banks that are generating significant loan growth, so be prepared. They will also be looking at the volume of policy and underwriting exceptions.

Largest Banks

SNL Financial reports the top 5 largest banks in the world as of Sep 30, 2013 were Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (\$3.1T, China); HSBC Holdings (\$2.7T, UK); Credit Agricole (\$2.6T, France); BNP Paribas (\$2.5T, France) and Mitsubishi UFJ (\$2.5T). Meanwhile, the top 5 largest banks in the US to hit the charts were JPMorgan (#6, \$2.5T), Bank of America (#12, \$2.2T), Citigroup (#14, \$2.1T), Wells Fargo (#21, \$1.5T) and Goldman Sachs (#28, \$923B). The five US banks have increased their market share in 2013 to 44% of all US industry assets (vs. only 9.7% in 1990).

Short Rates

A Fed study indicates short term rates are not likely to begin rising until 2015, with an optimal timing of 2017. Bankers will need to be prepared, stress test assumptions and monitor communications to stay on top of this.

Fed

Bloomberg points out key data that will be monitored by incoming FOMC Chair Janet Yellen includes: the unemployment rate (currently 7.3% vs. 5.0% at the start of the recession); labor force participation rate (62.8% vs. 66.0%); payroll growth (204k vs. 93k) and other factors. Bankers will be monitoring them as well.

Asset Growth

The FDIC points out in research that banks with assets < \$1B have increased assets by growing securities portfolios at a 7.0% annual clip since 2008 vs. loan growth of only 0.7%. Total securities as a percentage of total assets increased 25% (from 18.5% to 23.1%) over this period while total loans to assets declined 11% (from 70.3% to 62.5%).

Happy

Bloomberg reports a recent survey finds US consumers are more upbeat right now on the economy than at any time in the prior 6Ys. A better job market, personal financial condition and rising home values were all cited as reasons.

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