

# THE Customer Service Advantage™

Inside information on how to provide exceptional service that delights customers, in a fast-read format, twice a month.

October 15, 2010

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Stress hits, morale drops

## IN AN UPCOMING ISSUE

Four ways one manager keeps employees happy and customers happier.

## Help customers 24/7 – even when you can't be there

### ■ Our plans kept 97% of customers loyal

Customer loyalty is the lifeblood of most companies' success.

And service pros who get to talk to customers every day can keep that blood pumping stronger than ever.

Here are three loyalty-building tactics you can try from PeopleCube, which retains 97% of its customers year after year.

#### TRY THIS NOW

Give frontliners and managers monthly people-skill training.

So he and his customer service pros worked on a plan to make customers' experiences after buying extra special.

First on the agenda: Anderson created a "professional services team" – a group of in-house technical and customer service experts.

They gave customers extra attention – visiting their sites, tutoring them

on using PeopleCube products and encouraging the people as they learned to use the products.

The reason for all the attention:

*(Please turn to Help customers ... on p. 2)*

### Gave extra attention up front

John T. Anderson, CEO at the Farmington, MA technology company, wanted its Service to stand out from the competitors.

#### WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T

## What inconsistent service wins: Poor ratings

Consistency is one key to customers' heart.

And companies that don't deliver consistent service might end up on the *MSN Money* Customer Service Wall of Shame – like this year's No. 7, Time Warner Cable.

### Is their solution the right one?

Nearly a third of its customers said the company provided poor service. Their top complaints: receiving

conflicting price and service info from reps, long wait times and difficulty reaching people who could actually help with their problems.

Time Warner has added service reps who search social sites and blogs for complaints and try to help those people. But it might not be enough.

*A better idea:* Make it easier for customers to report problems straight to Service, and train reps to give consistent solutions.

Source: [www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com)

## Help customers ...

(continued from p. 1)

Customers who know how to use products properly feel extremely satisfied with the experience.

### Provided customers 24/7 help

For more help and personal attention, Anderson and his service pros created a 24/7 “support portal” filled with FAQs, product updates, etc. Customers could request help, answers and details on new or changing products. They even rated how important their issue was – from “show stopper” to “small issue.”

Then service pros knew how to react.

### Kept people skills sharp, too

Technical help alone can't win total customer loyalty. So Anderson made sure frontline service pros and managers had soft skills. They did monthly training on people skills, using material they found online and through industry organizations.

Now PeopleCube has exceeded best-in-class service standards and kept almost all customers.

## Study: Customers talk 'good,' not trash

### ■ More people share positive experiences than complain

Here's another good reason to give your best service at all times:

More than 75% of customers tell others about good service experiences. Only 60% talk about bad events.

### In the right place

You have a regular role in forming customers' opinions of your company. When you give a great experience, help customers spread the word to

others. Once they're satisfied:

- Remind customers of how they can compliment your work – in a survey, to your manager, on a company blog or via a referral.
- Ask them to be references. Get customers' permission to use their names and comments with potential customers.

Source: *The American Express Global Customer Service Barometer*, [www.americanexpress.com](http://www.americanexpress.com)

## Sharpen your JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

### ■ Demoted on leave: Is it OK to make the change?

Customer Service Manager Nancy Marsh couldn't help smiling when she looked over a well-organized customer activity list. The info wasn't much different from what she'd received in the past. But this was clear, concise and on time.

“You're doing an incredible job, Dan,” she told the employee who'd just handed it to her. “I'm thankful for your thoroughness and dedication to doing the job right.”

“Thanks.” Dan said. “I sure enjoy the work. Sure will miss it, too.”

Dan had bounced from job to job in the back office since he was in high school. When service rep Joanie Briggs took maternity leave recently, Dan filled in – and wowed everyone.

Nancy didn't want him to go either. “Let's see about that. You're better suited for this job than you think.”

### HR likes the idea, rep doesn't

Joanie was due back to work in a few weeks, and Nancy dreaded it. The rep was a train wreck long before she left – and Nancy had performance reviews to prove it. So Nancy hatched a plan and took it to HR: “I want to keep Dan and give Joanie some back office duties.”

HR liked it, but Joanie didn't. She sued, claiming they violated her rights under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The company stood its ground in court. Did it win?

■ Make your decision, then please turn to page 6 for the court's ruling.

### THE Customer Service Advantage™

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# Never deal with a 'tough customer' again: Change the way you see him

■ You'll find new ways to deal with and help these customers

Change the way you perceive tough customers, and you might be able to deal with them better.

In fact, you may never deal with a "tough customer" again.

If you cast some personality types that are harder to deal with in a new light, you'll find the best ways to handle and help them.

## See them in a new light

Here are some of the toughest, plus new ways to see and deal with them:

**Pushy or demanding** – *Knows what he wants.* As long as he wants something within your capabilities, and it is safe for everyone, deliver it.

**Argumentative** – *Eager to debate possibilities.* Offer a few alternatives so he can debate the best for his need.

**Complaining** – *Willing to say what's on his mind.* Thank him for taking the time to share his concerns and take fast steps to resolve them.

**Slow** – *Deliberate.* Double check

your work to satisfy his deliberate ways and help ensure he won't call a second or third time.

**Cold** – *Reserved person who takes time to establish trust.* Let him know your qualifications and share information about yourself to encourage him to open up a little.

**Obnoxious** – *Intelligent person who feels under-appreciated.* Recognize and compliment his intelligence and choices.

**Cranky** – *Tenacious.* Stay positive and pleasant, and your attitude will likely rub off a little.

**Intimidating** – *Wants more respect and authority.* Invite him to give his opinion on product choices, services, solutions, etc.

**Cheap** – *Fearful of being separated from his money.* Emphasize benefits when talking about price so he can see it's worth his money.

*Source:* Who's Your Gladys, by Marilyn Suttle and Lori Jo Vest, published by AMACOM Books, [www.amacombooks.org](http://www.amacombooks.org)

## What angry customers want now

■ How to satisfy them immediately

Upset customers want more than to hear themselves talk (albeit in an angry, loud tone).

In their anger, they sometimes don't make it clear that they want:

### Your ear

Hear them out. Don't interrupt – unless they're abusive.

### Acknowledgement

Recognize they've experienced a problem or inconvenience and that you'll take responsibility for it to be

right again. Say, "I'm sorry this has happened. Let me fix this for you."

### Fast help

The last thing you want to tell upset customers is you can't help. Even if you aren't the person to solve it, tell them what you can do. "I can take you to the right person now."

### Choices

Customers are often angry because they feel they have no control over the situation. So offer a few solutions and let them choose their favorite.

## SHARED KNOWLEDGE

Our subscribers come from companies of all sizes and industries. But most face similar customer service dilemmas. In this feature, one subscriber explains a problem he or she faces right now. Our panel gives suggestions on how to handle it.

**Q:** A long-time customer, who I've worked with closely for many years, recently asked me to keep a secret about his business that will ultimately affect my company. I don't want to betray his confidence, and I don't want to keep the information from my boss and company. What can I do?

**A:** If you said you would not tell the secret, then you are obligated to honor your word, says **Peggy Morrow**, a certified customer service speaker, consultant and trainer, and author of **Customer Service: How to Do It Right!** ([www.peggymorrow.com](http://www.peggymorrow.com)).

The only other option is to go to the customer and tell him you feel very uncomfortable knowing the details

## Ask for permission to tell your boss.

and keeping it from your company and boss. Then ask for permission to tell your boss, Morrow suggests.

If it ever happens again, don't let the customer tell you the information. (Hopefully he'll give you the chance before he blurts it out.)

Stop the customer in the beginning and say it would make you feel uncomfortable keeping valuable information from your employer, Morrow says.

■ If you have a question you'd like to ask our panel of experts, please contact our editor at [mmcgovern@pbp.com](mailto:mmcgovern@pbp.com)

### ■ **Raise satisfaction: Invest in people, not technology**

You'll get the biggest bang for your buck when you want to raise customer satisfaction by investing in people, not technology.

One of things that annoys people most is not getting a human on the phone, a *Consumer Reports* survey found. That was a close second to hidden fees and more annoying than cell phone use by drivers, spam and noisy neighbors.

So a live voice when customers call – even if that person can't help immediately – can raise satisfaction.

Source: [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org)

### ■ **Make customers smile when they least expect it**

Make customers smile when they least expect it, and they'll remember your company and maybe even give great feedback.

Clothing company NYDJ puts a sticker inside clothes that isn't immediately seen that says, "NYDJ cannot be held responsible for any positive consequence that may arise due to you looking fabulous when wearing our jeans. We'd love to hear from you at ..."

Maybe you can put a funny, complimentary note at the bottom of invoices, e-mails or in packaging.

### ■ **12 minutes a day to get organized**

People aren't efficient if they have to sift through piles on their desks.

To regain control of the piles, experts suggest scheduling 12 minutes a day to organize. Set a timer, and you should have it organized within a week and be able to keep it that way.

### ■ **Key to recognition: More frequent, smaller goals**

Managers: To give your recognition and rewards more momentum, switch

up the pace.

Recognize smaller accomplishments (perhaps steps toward a large goal) more frequently – and with smaller rewards and horn-tooting – to be more effective. The frequency will have a bigger impact on morale until the goal is met.

### ■ **How to stop chronic chatters before they can start**

When you know you have to call or visit a talkative customer or co-worker, take steps early to keep the conversation under control.

- Set a time limit so the person isn't offended or surprised when you wrap it up. You might say, "I have another call to take in 10 minutes. That leaves us plenty of time to discuss this."
- Meet away from offices or desks (maybe a meeting room) so you can get up and leave, and
- Ask someone to interrupt you at a specific time.

### ■ **Tired? The best way to get groove back, avoid mistakes**

The best way to keep yourself and colleagues alert when facing the yawns is only a cup away.

Coffee was more effective than a nap in preventing employees from making mistakes, a recent study found.

So when afternoon sleepiness settles in, make sure the pot is full!

### ■ **Learning opportunity: Win and keep customers**

Pick up the most effective ways to communicate with customers, gain their respect and help your company excel in Service and customer loyalty at the American Management Association's seminar, "Customer Service Excellence: How to Win and Keep Customers." Various locations and times through the fall and winter. \$1,795. [www.amanet.org](http://www.amanet.org)

## TACTICS PROVEN TO WORK

*This feature focuses on quick ideas and tactics that customer service professionals have successfully implemented.*

### ■ **Unique way to get employees to share ideas**

Even with company training, the best lessons often come from co-workers who've "been there, done that" and know what works well. If you want to encourage employees to share their tips and best practices more, try what Margie Trueland, QA Manager at Shurtech Brands in Avon, OH, did: She put forms throughout the company for employees to fill out when a co-worker helped them, explaining what had happened.

A company leader picked a name from the many that were submitted monthly, read the story and gave the "helper" a small prize. Bonus: The program helped team-building and made new employees – who got most of the help and made nominations – feel at home.

### ■ **One way to save on office supplies**

Here's a way to be a "greener" office and save money from Laurie Sparr, Executive Assistant at OEConnection in Cleveland: The company's "Green Team" – a group of volunteers who brainstormed ideas to go green – started a Clean Out Your Desk Day. Employees got time to dig through desks to find paper clips, empty files, staples, pens, etc. that had been forgotten.

Everyone dumped their supplies in an organized central location. Then when employees needed office supplies down the road they checked the "reuse" area before ordering new.

Our subscribers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular feature, three of them share how they resolved a challenging customer service problem they encountered at their company.

### 1 LAST Approach: Key to keeping customers happy

We don't want our customers to experience any problems when they deal with us, our products or services.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen. They do run into issues and when they bring them to our attention, we want to make customers happy again quickly.

Although not all issues are the same – some are more complex and others are solved in a keystroke – we've found that we can make almost

all customers happy again by following our LAST Approach (meant to lead to *lasting* relationships).

#### Listen, Apologize, Solve, Thank

Here's what we do:

Listen to customers until they've said all they need to say.

Apologize for the problem, their inconvenience, the situation – anything.

Solve the issue as quickly and thoroughly as possible, keeping customers updated if it's not an immediate resolution.

Thank customers for something – the opportunity to fix the problem, coming in, their patience, etc.

This has helped us satisfy customers even when they face issues.

*(Debbie Holloman, Director of Customer Service, BB&T, Winston-Salem, NC)*

### 2 How we got support for our rewards and recognition

Unless you're directly involved with Service every day, it can be hard to understand why it's so important to recognize, reward and motivate those who serve customers.

Customer Service can sometimes be a thankless job, and frontliners need reinforcement and encouragement from their direct supervisors to stay motivated.

Problem is, supervisors can't do it all without resources that are often decided on by the company C-level.

When we wanted to get more

support for our ideas to motivate, reward and recognize customer service pros, we succeed like this:

#### Ready when we ask

We prepared an action plan before we went to upper management, outlining what we wanted to do, the timeframe, costs and how it would impact employees, Service and customers.

We also showed them a variety of ideas from no- and low-cost to

larger incentives.

Then we reminded them that it cost a lot less to motivate than to deal with attrition. Plus, our celebrations fostered relationships, morale, retention and goal achievement.

This approach has helped us gain the support we need to keep our frontline service pros motivated, rewarded and recognized.

*(Kimberly Warrick, Manager of Client Services, New Jersey SHARES, Inc., Hamilton, NJ)*

### 3 Service Hero: When Customer Service is a real lifesaver

When it comes to being a service pro, it's often useful to be able to help customers with more than their product and service issues.

In some cases, it can actually be a lifesaver. Take this, for example.

A customer had frantically come into our store carrying his young child and screaming for help.

We dropped what we were doing and ran to see what was wrong and if we could do anything to help. Turns out his little boy was having a

seizure and couldn't breathe.

We started CPR right away and after a minute heard a wonderful thing: The two-year-old coughed, cried and breathed on his own.

#### Ready and able

Paramedics arrived, told us the CPR likely saved the boy's life, and took him to the hospital where he recovered.

We'd both recently learned CPR

for different reasons.

We're always glad to help customers, but this time we were thankful we had the skills to help someone in the greatest need.

*(This real-life customer service hero story was provided by Ammar Dardari and Raymond Golak, clerks at Best Buy in Brooklyn, OH, on [www.fox8.com](http://www.fox8.com))*

If you have a heroic tale you'd like to share, e-mail our editor at [mmcgovern@bbp.com](mailto:mmcgovern@bbp.com)

# Four ways to make your service operations green and lean

## ■ How some companies save money and the planet

Despite what Kermit the Frog says, it's getting easier to be green.

More and more customer service operations want to run greener and leaner. Many have found ways that have helped them cut costs, too.

### Get customers on board, too

Here are four new and best practices for green customer service:

**1. Cut postal mail.** Many banks and credit card companies created secure e-mail portals so customers can view and act on their accounts. It's eliminated a bulk of mailings. *Key:* Remind customers of electronic invoices and account info when you send the papers and during phone calls to gain attention and buy-in.

**2. Reduce the number of tech visits.** One home appliance manufacturer has saved \$50 million by equipping customer service reps to troubleshoot over the phone before sending a tech out to solve issues on site. *Key:* Give phone reps hands-on experience fixing issues so they can

explain better over the phone.

**3. Reduce returns.** One wireless handset company reduced exchanges by 38% when service reps were allowed to spend more time explaining how to use devices (rather than immediately giving a replacement when customers complained of a malfunction). *Key:* Reps need to be empowered to help and fix, not just replace.

**4. Improve first-visit resolution.** When the same appliance manufacturer must send techs to customer sites, they cut the likelihood for a revisit by equipping techs with more laptop details on issues similar to the one they're fixing. Then they can fix all potential issues while on site. *Key:* On-site and off-site reps and techs would have access to info on similar solved issues to follow best practices.

*Source: "7 Attributes of Highly Green Customer Service Contact Centers," by Anand Subramaniam, VP of Worldwide Marketing, eGain Communications Corp., www.egain.com*

## THE LIGHTER SIDE

### ■ Act on impulse: End up in lake or with \$3K taxi bill

Customers can do the craziest things.

Prime examples: These travelers who acted on impulse:

- A Polish man stayed true to his GPS device, ignoring three warning signs on the road that danger was ahead. He and two passengers escaped the car after he drove it – according to directions – into a flooded area.
- An allegedly drunk first-class passenger wouldn't wait for economy passengers to exit the plane so he took a shortcut – through the emergency exit and down the chute.
- A man missed his flight to a friend's bachelor party, so he hailed a taxi to get there. The 17-hour, 740 mile trip to Munich cost him \$3,170 (far less than a new flight).

*Source: USA Weekend, 6/11/10.*

## Sharpen your judgment ...

### THE DECISION

(see case on page 2)

Yes. The company won and didn't have to give Joanie her old job.

An attorney for Joanie based his case on an FMLA rule that says companies can't demote employees while on maternity leave. Joanie was on leave and essentially demoted.

However, the company's attorney based its case on the few instances when it's OK to demote an employee on leave. Specifically, the attorney argued that Joanie had a track

record of poor performance. Dan's good work only made it more obvious.

The court agreed based on one important factor: Nancy's thorough documentation of Joanie's performance.

### Stay on top of documenting

Key to winning this case: Thorough performance reviews and documents on other issues with Joanie. To avoid a similar suit, document issues and have employees sign off on them.

*Cite: Schaaf v. SmithKline Beecham Corp., No. 09-10806, U.S. Circuit Ct. 11, 4/6/10.*

Dramatized for effect.

## FROM OUR SUBSCRIBERS

*Our readers report that CSA – with its quick-read format and real-life examples of what's working in customer service – is more valuable to them than any other publication in the field.*

“I like the easy-to-read layout with concise information in *The Customer Service Advantage*. It makes it easy to obtain the information and share it with others.”

**Jude Murray**  
VP  
eni

# 9 keys to better, more effective team building activities

## ■ How to gain and keep interest

Your “team” doesn’t practice and play games on a field every week like professional athletes.

So you probably have to create or find activities for them to do together to build a stronger team.

To make your team-building activities more effective (and everyone interested in them), follow these tactics:

### More isn’t better for instructions

- **Keep it simple.** Use activities that are quick, can be done in a meeting room and don’t require a lot of instruction.
- **Keep it inexpensive.** You can find a bevy of teambuilding ideas online that don’t need much more than pantry or office supply items. Click here for two: [tinyurl.com/2activities](http://tinyurl.com/2activities)
- **Match the activity with what people wear to work.** If most wear heels and suits, it can’t be a physically active event.
- **Keep the groups small.** People have a hard time relating to large groups. So if yours is large, break it

down into smaller groups of up to six people.

- **Limit the instructions.** Part of the lesson and team building can be the group working together to figure out what they need to do or how to do it.
- **Make it snappy.** The exercise should pull people in quickly. So make sure you pick something that fits their interests. Example: If most are football fans, use an activity with the game as the theme.
- **Allow for several solutions.** The activity should present a problem that has several solutions. That gives groups more room to be creative and collaborate.
- **Turn it up a notch.** If an activity seems too easy, increase the difficulty by adding a rule such as “no talking” or limiting the time they have to finish it.
- **Reflect.** When the activity is over, give team members time to talk about why they chose to do what they did, and what they’d do differently next time.

## MOTIVATION IN ACTION

### ■ Best ways to motivate? How to find the answer fast

Managers: When you want to know the best ways to keep your customer service pros motivated, go straight to source.

If you interview them – or just send an e-mail survey and require them to complete it – you’ll find the answers fast.

#### Details revealed

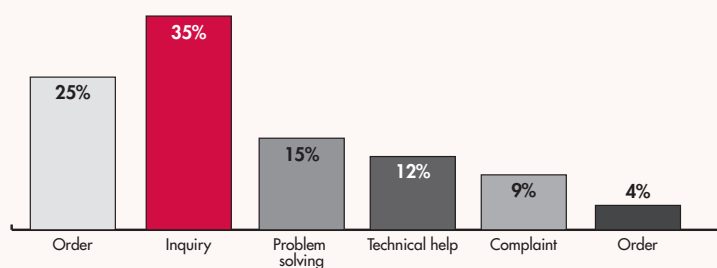
Here’s what you’ll want to ask – and the important details the answers reveal:

- **What part of the job is most rewarding to you?** *Find out:* the tasks they’ll do best and happily.
- **What tools are the greatest help in doing your job?** *Find out:* the equipment and resources to keep updated and accessible.
- **What do you think is expected of you?** *Find out:* if you need to align their goals and expectations with yours and the company’s so no one is disappointed.
- **What should leaders do to get your best performance?** *Find out:* how you can make their work better and more rewarding.
- **What makes you feel successful at your job?** *Find out:* the areas of their work to praise and recognize the most.
- **What factors need to be in place to motivate you to do your best?** *Find out:* the carrots to dangle so they strive for excellence.

**Source:** Unleashing Excellence: The Complete Guide to Ultimate Customer Service, by Dennis Snow and Teri Yanovitch, published by John Wiley & Sons.

## WHY DO CUSTOMERS CONTACT YOU?

Why are customers contacting Service?



Source: A Customer Service Newsletter survey

Good news: Even on tough days, most customers aren’t complaining! Most (60%) order or ask questions – the best opportunities for you to help the company’s bottom line. One key: After you’ve helped customers, mention a product or service that complements what they’ve ordered or asked about.

Customer service managers often find themselves in situations requiring management and people skills. In each issue, we present a challenging scenario and ask three CSA readers how they'd handle it.

# It's the most stressful time, and morale takes a hit: What can manager do?

## The Scenario

Customer Service Manager Lee Roberts nearly dropped an array of office supplies in his arms when he hit elbows with Kathy Mason in the hall. She mumbled "sorry" and kept walking at a fast pace.

Lee stopped to regain his balance and hollered, "Hold on there a minute, Kathy."

Kathy turned around and looked impatiently from Lee to the stack of files in her hands. "I said sorry."

"I know." Lee walked closer to her. "I'm sorry, too. And I wanted to commend you on how you handled that irate customer this morning. I heard your end of the conversation, and he e-mailed later praising how you handled it. I have a couple of movie

passes here for you."

Usually Lee's praise and rewards put smiles on his employees' faces and boosted their morale. But Kathy just looked at the tickets.

"I'm too busy to go to a movie."

She looked toward the whole department. "We all are."

"Maybe there's something else you'd like ..." Lee started, but she walked away.

### WE LISTEN

This scenario was written in response to a subscriber's request.

### Too much for some

It was the busiest and most stressful time of year for Service. Lee made extra efforts to recognize and reward reps. But many of them – Kathy especially – couldn't overcome the stress. Morale took a hit for some time.

If you were Lee, what else would you do to raise morale in stressful times?

## INSPIRING QUOTES

There is a spiritual aspect to our lives – when we give we receive. When a business does something good for somebody, that somebody feels good about them.

Ben Cohen

It's quite fun to do the impossible.

Walt Disney

Speak when you are angry – and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret.

Dr. Laurence J. Peter

## Reader Responses

### 1 Brenda Hill, Customer Service Development Manager, Brenntag Southwest, Lancaster, TX

*What Brenda would do:* I'd bring in lunch for the customer service staff to share. So everyone can enjoy it without interruption, I'd ask the sales staff to cover the phones.

*Reason:* The workload won't let up for now, so the group can at least get a brief break that includes fun, food and laughter.

### 2 Rick Wold, Senior Director of Customer Service, J.R. Simplot Co., Boise, ID

*What Rick would do:* First, I'd improve communication with reps to reduce any uncertainty about their jobs and futures. I'd consult with the reps to be sure their workload is suitable to their abilities and resources, avoiding unrealistic deadlines. I'd continue to offer rewards and incentives and

praise good work. Finally, I'd cultivate a friendly social climate with fun social activities and interactions for employees.

*Reason:* There could be other things impacting the department, and the manager needs to look at and address the big picture.

### 3 Bill Gessert, Senior Partner, TeleSolutions Consultants, Metuchen, NJ

*What Bill would do:* I'd gather the team when the stressful time is over and show them true respect for what they do by folding them into a discussion on what we can do differently to make those times better. I'd also find out *from them* what would be helpful to them during the stressful times and try to implement the ideas they give.

*Reason:* The team may have great ideas that would improve operations during stressful periods. And while nothing is inherently wrong with the "movie ticket" approach, significant stressful times need a more strategic approach to motivation.

## The Purpose of Customer Service Advantage

*Customer Service Advantage* is a fast-read resource to help customer service pros keep customers satisfied, improve service, increase customer loyalty and manage the stress of the job.

Twice a month it offers real-world examples of how other companies cope with the pressures of providing customer service that creates enthusiastic customers.

CSA's mission is to provide practical methods for increasing customer satisfaction, keeping motivated day in and day out, and gaining internal support.