6 Easy Ways to Reduce Customer Stress

Recently I was reading the *USA Today* and a Snapshots® graph about shopping stress caught my eye. Shopping stress? I suppose I might feel stressed if I blew my budget or if I waited until an hour before a party to go shopping for a gift. I looked at the graph more closely. It wasn't about spending too much money or poor planning. It was about the retail experience and the statistics were surprising.

An online survey, conducted by the *Consumer Reports Research Center*, asked 1,264 women what they find most stressful when shopping:

- 33% said checkout lines
- 29% said interacting with salespeople
- 24% said finding the best price
- 14% said finding the right product

That means 62 percent – almost two out of every three women surveyed – said they find basic customer service the most stressful aspect of shopping! In other words, you have an opportunity to impact your customer's experience in easy but meaningful ways! Start with these easy ways to reduce customer stress.

1. **Stay out of the checkout area unless you are taking care of customers.**
   I once overheard an employee explain why she wasn't opening another register – even though she was standing in the checkout area. "We're only supposed to help when there are more than three people waiting."

   I was the third person in line and evidently it didn't matter how long we may have been standing there; until someone else joined us, we were stuck. You can bet the person in front of me started grumbling about what that employee was getting paid to do. If you're not checking out customers, stay out of the checkout area. It only serves to frustrate customers.

2. **Stop non-customer tasks and focus on checking out your customers.**
   It's tempting to have your customers wait for you to finish a task. After all, nobody likes to get interrupted when they're in the middle of something. But, that something is a lower priority than the customer standing in front of you. When customers feel like they are waiting *needlessly,* you can almost see their blood pressure rise. Waiting in line while other employees are stocking shelves, talking on the phone, or – the worst infraction in the world of serving customers – chatting among themselves, is sure to build your customers' stress level. Respect their time and don't make them wait.

3. **Acknowledge the customer who is waiting.**
   We all want to be noticed. A smile and a sincere greeting, or "I'll be with you in just a moment" to the person who has just joined the line goes a long way. As long as you don't engage the second customer at the expense of the person in front of you, then you have an opportunity to make both customers feel valued. And, if there was a wait, you should acknowledge it by saying something like, "thanks for your patience."

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4. **Treat your customers as a boss.**
   It's common sense to say that without customers you'd be out of business. Yet time and again I watch service-oriented companies treat their customers as an afterthought. They should be treated as the boss. Without customers there would be no reason to stock the shelves or get that display set up.

   I'm not saying that product and marketing aren't important. They are. But, if customers are needlessly waiting in line as you are setting up that display, there's a problem. Believe me, those customers aren't thinking, "Wow, look at how hard that employee is working to finish that display." They're thinking, "When is that guy going to notice us and open another register." Pay attention to them and what they need.

5. **Get help when you need help.**
   I have seen employees so overwhelmed during a rush that they don't take a moment to call for help. It's okay and it's expected. Customers are forgiving when it comes to getting help. They'll let you take a moment to call for help. At another time, it might be them waiting.

6. **Develop a shining attitude.** We all know that attitudes impact behaviors. When we have a bad mood it shows. It shows in our mannerisms, our expressions, our words, and our tone of voice. That is, unless, we make a decision to leave our bad mood at the door and choose to develop a shining attitude instead.

   The neat part is that while we're developing a shining attitude, it becomes a shining attitude that affects our behaviors. Before you know it, your good mood shows and you'll enjoy work more.

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