



How to deliver **EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE**

It's the little things you do that create a create customer experience, explains **Nikki Heald**, managing director of Corptraining

Often we're so intent on making the sale that we have a transactional view of our clients, rather than taking time to build relationships or demonstrate service excellence. We use them (to increase our profits), abuse them (by giving them inferior service), and then treat them like a one-night stand – attentive today, neglectful tomorrow!

Sounds silly? Well, complaints such as “you never call”, “you’re always too busy”, and “why were you late?” are legitimate gripes made by disgruntled clients. In today’s competitive market,

DID YOU KNOW?

It's **6–7** times more expensive to gain a new client than it is to retain an existing one

It's not safe to work on the premise of "no news is good news". Chances are, if your client is not happy, they'll walk and won't even forewarn you of their departure



of customers indicated that quality customer service was vital to maintaining brand loyalty

client service expectations have increased. Clients are savvy, realise they have a multitude of choices, and expect to be treated exceptionally by their insurance brokers.

So what is exceptional service? Exceptional client service is about going beyond what is realistically expected of you. It's about surprising and often delighting clients, turning them into enthusiastic referral sources who will stick with you not only because you do great work but also because of the value you bring. Imagine if you could get existing clients to tell others about how wonderful you are. It would certainly save on all of those marketing and networking costs.

Great service is not about just doing your job, it's also about establishing connections on an emotional level. It's about value-adding and finding ways to be unique. Interestingly, research suggests that emotion influences purchasing decisions six times as often as rationale. Think about it: when something makes us feel good, we are more inclined to buy.

Unfortunately, many businesses believe that delivering stand-out service will cost them too much in staff time, in training and developing service standards and procedures. These in-focused organisations are only concerned with company profit and cutting costs, and little thought is given to how to make clients happy. Additionally, staff recognition and retention are low, which can also impact significantly on growth and profit.

When you think about it realistically, bad service is actually more costly to your brokerage than great service. Bad service creates more than just a negative customer experience – it reduces revenue and drives up costs. It damages public

perception, credibility and market reputation. As we all know, a dissatisfied client is more likely to spread the word about a poor service experience than a positive one.

Providing exceptional service is not overly difficult, and it's important to recognise that even little things count with clients. So what are some simple things you can do to ensure your service is exceptional?

1 RESPOND AS SOON AS YOU CAN

Speed is everything, so try to reply to your clients as soon as you can and keep them in the loop as to your progress. Procrastination doesn't help anyone, and you're going to have to respond sooner or later. May as well do it now!

2 LISTEN TO YOUR CLIENTS

Avoid speaking, and really listen to what they're saying. It's important you understand what your clients are communicating to you. That way, you will be able to meet their needs successfully and provide the correct product or cover.

3 KEEP PROMISES

One of the biggest gripes in business today is that people simply don't do what they say they're

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SERVICE EVALUATION:

What systems do you have in place to determine whether your clients are happy? Try to gather feedback – but remember, feedback is only useful when acted upon

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4 KNOW YOUR STUFF

The perception of your client is that you are the paid expert. That's why they have come to you. So it is imperative that you keep yourself up to date and top of the game within your profession. Be ready to answer client questions – unfortunately, if you convey a lack of knowledge, then you risk ruining your credibility.

5 GIVE A LITTLE

If a client asks you to do something that really won't cost you a lot in time or money, then treat it as an opportunity to go the extra mile. By doing so, you will not only have a contented and indebted client, but someone who is more than happy to refer others to you.

6 USE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Once you've built an emotional connection with your client, you will have figured out how they prefer to communicate. Some clients are not detail driven and won't require excessive information. On the other hand, some prefer to know every step of the process. Learn to gauge your client's preferences and use this knowledge appropriately in the service experience.

Finally, within the insurance and financial services profession, brokers really should view their book of clients as their most valuable asset and take good care of them. More than that, they should take the time to develop long-lasting relationships by keeping in touch regularly, both in good times and bad. It's not sufficient to wait until renewal time to contact your client; instead, the communication should be ongoing.

Remember, you're not just selling a product but providing expert advice that can significantly impact on people's livelihood. So, if you haven't given much thought to your service levels, then perhaps it's time to conduct a self-audit. Remember, if you don't make the client feel valued, respected and important, your competitors will! 

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DELIVERING EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE:

- Lower cost to manage and service client base – higher profits
- Increased customer loyalty – raises revenue, lowers marketing fees
- Increased staff loyalty – better service culture