

10 Customer Service Activities To Supercharge Your Team



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About Jeff Toister

Jeff Toister helps customer service teams unlock their hidden potential.

He is the author of *Service Failure: The Real Reasons Employees Struggle with Customer Service and What You Can Do About It*, a book that reveals hidden obstacles to outstanding service.

The activities in this workbook are based on the book *Service Failure*. The book is available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other retailers. Please visit www.servicefailurebook.com/buy for more purchasing options.

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Introduction

Customer service leaders face a number of challenges:

- What does it take to get employees to fully commit to providing service?
- How can employees better handle upset customers?
- Why did my employee just do that?!

This workbook contains ten customer service training activities to help answer these questions and more. These activities are designed to help employees identify and overcome hidden obstacles to outstanding service.

Each exercise corresponds to a different chapter from the book, *Service Failure*. The book itself is a helpful resource, but is not required to implement these activities.

Additional Resources

These resources can help augment the exercises in this workbook.

Customer Service Tip of the Week

This reminder service delivers one customer service tip each week via email.

To sign-up, visit www.toistersolutions.com/ideas

Inside Customer Service Blog

This blog delivers unique analysis, tips, and trends to help you unlock your customer service team's hidden potential.

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Customer Service Training Videos

Jeff Toister has partnered with the online video training portal lynda.com to create engaging, high-quality customer service training videos.

To view the courses, visit: www.lynda.com/JeffToister

A lynda.com subscription is required, but you can obtain a free 10-day trial by visiting www.lynda.com/trial/JeffToister

Exercise 1: Helping Customers Be Right

Overview

Chapter two of *Service Failure* looks at ways customers can sabotage the service they receive. While customers are not always right, it should be our mission to help them **be** right.

The Exercise

This activity can help you identify ways to help customers be right.

1. Start by thinking of a specific situation where a customer got confused or made a mistake.
2. Make a list of factors about this situation that are out of your control.
3. Now, make a list of factors about this situation that you can control.
4. Focus on the factors that you can control and try to think of solutions to help the customer be right.

Example:

Many visitors got lost the first time they visited a college campus.

Can't Control	Can Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visitors are often in a hurry which causes stress.• The parking restrictions in various garages can be confusing.• The best parking garage might not be the closest to your destination.• People don't remember verbal directions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friendly parking ambassadors are stationed at various places on campus.• Other staff members (custodial, maintenance, etc.) regularly come into contact with visitors on campus.

Solution:

- Train staff members to identify campus visitors who appear to be lost.
- Ask staff members to approach visitors and offer assistance.
- Provide staff with small maps to give to visitors to help guide them.

Exercise 2: Customer Complaints

Overview

Chapter three of *Service Failure* examines reasons why employees might not share the same goals as their employer.

Customer complaints provide a great example. The company can use a complaint to fix a problem, but research shows that most customers don't complain about small problems.

Even when they do complain, most complaints are directed to frontline employees. Employees might not want to share complaints if they're afraid of being blamed or feel that there's nothing they can do about it.

This exercise helps employees feel committed to identifying and resolving complaints.

The Exercise

There are two parts to this exercise. Both activities are best done in a team meeting.

Part 1: Identifying Complaints

Here is a list of reasons why customers might not readily share their feedback:

- It's too difficult to complain
- They feel their complaint won't be listened to or acted upon
- They don't want to get a employee into trouble
- They're afraid of retribution from an angry employee
- There's nothing to be gained by complaining

Considering this list, brainstorm ideas for encouraging customers to share their feedback directly so problems can be resolved.

Ask each person to commit to soliciting more customer feedback before the next team meeting.

Part 2: Categorizing Complaints

Part two should happen at the next team meeting.

1. Brainstorm examples of customer feedback received.
2. Make a list of the most common complaints.
3. Discuss solutions to the biggest problems.

Exercise 3: Productivity vs. Quality

Overview

Chapter 4 of *Service Failure* explores situations where employees are faced with conflicting priorities.

For example, on a busy day, we might struggle to provide each individual customer with personal and attentive service if we have a long line of people waiting for our assistance.

This exercise can help you explore the balance between productivity and quality. It works best in a team or group setting with a **minimum of six people**.

The Exercise

This exercise is done in two rounds with a short debriefing in between. You'll need a timer or stopwatch for this activity.

Round 1

Participants will have three minutes to introduce themselves to three people and learn three things:

- 1) The person's name
- 2) A hobby or interest outside of work
- 3) The person's customer service strength

Call time after three minutes and ensure everyone stops.

Debrief

Ask for volunteers to name all three people they spoke to and correctly list the three pieces of information for each person. Typically, only a few participants can do this.

Discussion questions:

- What made the exercise difficult?
- What strategies could we use to balance productivity and quality the next time?
- What can we learn from this exercise that applies to our work?

Round 2

Replay round 1, but ask participants to introduce themselves to three new people this time.

Check to see whether more people can successfully name the three people they met and correctly list the three pieces of information for each person.

Exercise 4: Find the Iceberg

Overview

Chapter five of *Service Failure* looks at ways that chronic problems can hurt employee morale. Some of these problems are like icebergs. You can see a little bit of it, but the part that's hidden from view is bigger and more dangerous.

The challenge is icebergs can seem like small problems. Perhaps the tip of the iceberg is an unusual complaint. It's easy to write it off as a fluke or a one-time occurrence. But what if it's just the first sign of a much bigger problem?

High-performing customer service teams obsess about finding icebergs.

The Exercise

Start by making a list of unusual complaints or problems. Unlike the "Customer Complaints" exercise, these don't necessarily have to be the most common customer complaints.

Answer the following questions for each problem:

1. Is it possible the same problem has happened before?
2. How likely is it that this problem will happen again?
3. Can similar problems exist in other places?
4. Who else might be affected by the problem?
5. What can we learn from this problem that can be applied to other issues?

Exercise 5: Road Trip

Overview

Chapter six of *Service Failure* reveals some of the ways that organizational culture can influence service. Our jobs are so busy that it can sometimes be difficult to pause and make sure we're all headed in the same direction.

This activity can help participants realize how easy it is to be busy without purpose. A **minimum of six participants** is recommended.

The Exercise

This exercise is conducted in two rounds with a short debriefing after each round. This exercise works best with **a minimum of six participants**. You'll need a watch or a timer for this exercise.

Round 1

Tell participants you're going to give them one minute to brainstorm items they'd take with them on a road trip. They are encouraged to work together in small groups.

Quickly say, "Ready, go!" and start the exercise before anyone has a chance to ask questions.

Debrief 1

Start by asking how many items participants have on their list. Eventually, the key question will come up, "Where are we going?" For example, if someone has a map on their list, you can ask, "A map to where?"

Discuss the importance of having a destination.

Round 2

Repeat round 1, but give participants a destination this time. Select someplace that might be a realistic road trip destination based on your location.

Debrief 2

Discuss the differences between the lists from round 1 and 2. Typically, the lists are very similar, but there are a few key items on the round 2 list that are specific to the destination.

The key point is a destination influences important decisions.

Wrap-up the discussion by talking about the team's customer service destination.

Exercise 6: The 10 and 5 Rule

Overview

Chapter seven in *Service Failure* explores reasons why customer service employees often find it difficult to pay attention to the right things.

One technique to help with this is the 10 and 5 rule. It's a way of prioritizing customer service over other tasks by creating a "zone of hospitality" around yourself.

When a customer enters the zone of hospitality, they should take precedence over other assignments.

Exercise

Start the exercise with a discussion around top priorities. The goal is to make it clear that serving customers is a top priority.

Now, explain the 10 and 5 rule.

Imagine two circles around you.

- The edge of the first circle is 10 feet away.
- The edge of the second circle is 5 feet away.

Customers approaching the outer circle should receive a non-verbal greeting such as a smile or a wave.

Customers approaching the inner circle should receive a verbal greeting.

Practice:

Ask participants to stand and imagine their circles. Walk to various points around the room and ask participants to greet you based upon where you are in their "zone of hospitality."

Debrief:

Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:

- How can you use the 10 and 5 rule with your customers?
- How should you handle situations where more than one customer wants your attention? (Ex: the customer you are serving and a new customer approaching you.)

Exercise 7: What's My Job?

Overview

Chapter eight of *Service Failure* describes how we sometimes view our jobs a little differently than our customers.

For example, an IT help desk professional might describe his job by saying, "I fix computers." However, if he considered his customers' perspective, he might describe his job by saying, "I help my customers quickly get back to work when they experience computer problems."

Looking at our roles from our customers' perspective can expand our understanding of how we can provide outstanding customer service.

The Exercise

Complete the exercise by answering these two questions.

1. What are some of your regular job duties?
2. Try to re-imagine each job duty from your customers' perspective. How would a customer describe what you do?

Exercise 8: Customer Empathy

Overview

Chapter nine in *Service Failure* focuses on empathy.

The challenge with empathy is we need to have a similar or relatable experience to truly put ourselves in our customers' shoes.

Exercise

Answer the questions below to learn how to demonstrate empathy while working with upset customers.

Start by thinking of a specific situation where a customer was upset.

1. Why was the customer upset or angry?

2. Have you ever had a similar feeling?

3. What can you do to demonstrate to empathize with your customer in this situation?

Exercise 9: Attitude Anchors

Overview

Chapter ten in *Service Failure* is all about attitude.

Research shows that negative emotions can be contagious. A negative attitude might even sneak up on us before we're even away of it.

The Attitude Anchor concept is a technique you can use to anchor your attitude in a positive place.

The Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to identify your own personal attitude anchors so you can use them on a regular basis to maintain a positive attitude when serving customers.

There are two types of attitude anchors:

- Maintenance anchors help you maintain a positive attitude
- Repair anchors help you fix a negative attitude

Make a list of the maintenance and repair anchors that work for you. A few examples have been provided for illustrative purposes, though these may or may not work for you.

Maintenance Anchors	Repair Anchors
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting a good night's sleep• Spending time with friends or family• Exercising <p>Your Maintenance Anchors:</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking a walk• Enjoying a cup of coffee or tea• Talking to a friend or co-worker <p>Your Repair Anchors:</p>

Exercise 10: Customer Lifetime Value

Overview

Chapter eleven of *Service Failure* reveals the consequences of companies getting too focused on cost containment.

The amount of money a customer will spend with your business over their lifetime is called “customer lifetime value.” This number is a powerful way of looking beyond customers at a transactional level and viewing them on a relationship level.

For example, Chris Zane, founder of Zane's Cycles, calculated that customers spent an average of \$12,500 at his store over their lifetime. Keeping this impressive number in mind made it easier for employees to focus on building a long-term relationship with every customer.

The Exercise

You can focus on lifetime value by asking two simple questions.

1. How much will your average customer spend with you over their lifetime?
2. What would you be willing to do to create, strengthen, and preserve that relationship?