

It's All About The Customer-00-4879

But to regard customer service as pass is at our own peril, especially so within the construction sector.

Sit tight for a quick revision of how core customer service principles relate to construction companies.

Professionalism

In an industry with a reputation that has, historically, been less than professional, this must be top priority. Professionalism covers attitudes, behaviour and appearance. It means being diligent and conscientious, courteous and respectful, smartly turned out and on time! But professionalism runs deeper to include ethics and values.

Often part of induction and training programmes, business ethics relates to how your company and employees deal with customers, business partners and each other. Commercial realities can put us in awkward situations where the choice is between making money or safeguarding our company's reputation. For example, you are bidding for a big contract which involves other parties. You have serious doubts about the reliability of the supply chain in one particular area but if you voice those doubts you risk losing the bid. Do you go ahead knowing the project has a high probability of failure, or do you alert your potential customer? Ethical behaviour can mean difficult decisions but remember this: the bid you win today is not so important as to risk jeopardising your business reputation tomorrow.

Performance

At times work isn't about what you do but where you stop! Good customer service means going the extra mile. Customers remember the extra things: the time you spent with them late Friday evening, the documents you couriered to the architect's office, the emergency fix over the bank holiday weekend. Doing the job well simply isn't enough any more. Marketing people continually talk about separation separating yourself from your competitors or making your company stand out from the crowd. You can do this by the way you promote your business but it will never be truly successful unless you raise the level of your game to the exceptional, going that additional mile and striving to be the best at what you do.

But things don't always go to plan and there are times when everyone has to face the fact that mistakes have been made. We're all human after all! This is where we need to be accountable for our actions and, at times, accept responsibility for areas where we have not been directly involved. To the customer, you are the company; not the building, not the MD, not the rest of the team. Although it is difficult in the extreme to shoulder blame that is not yours, the customer will remember what you did to put the problem right more clearly than they will remember the problem.

Well structured internal processes, such as escalation procedures, should come into play when problems arise. When these are transparent and the customer can see what is being done to rectify the matter, the heat is removed from the situation. Just as your construction business would undertake a risk analysis before going on site, regard this as a risk analysis on your business that will safeguard your hard won reputation by being accountable, taking responsibility and doing what's best for your customer.

People

And finally, a brief word about your people. No business can achieve exceptional customer service with a dissatisfied, demoralised or under-achieving workforce. Businesses are not entities, they are people, and to be successful they require commitment, hard work and initiative. People need encouragement, praise, training, mentoring and development opportunities if they are to be the best, and in a competitive world, being second best is not an option.

About the Author

Construction company Phelan Construction Ltd has experience in a wide variety of construction projects. Whether you are interested in construction, refurbishment or fit-out projects, Phelan Construction will be able to assist you.