

CUSTOMER SERVICE – **SELF STORAGE BEST PRACTICES**

By Lynn Sykes

We have all read articles on great customer service. We have all sat in a seminar on great customer service. We have all experienced customer service. We all have memories of great customer service. We all have stories of poor customer service.

I ask store managers all the time “What is the most important thing(s) that you do? Most of them will say “customer service”, others will say that the most important thing they do is to rent units and collect money. Which is the right answer? Well the most important is renting units and collecting money but you are not going to be as successful if your customer service is lacking. The ability to rent units and collect money is critical in Self-Storage – without either there is no success. However, great customer service is the qualifier whether your Self-Storage asset’s success is minimal, marginal or incredible! When analyzing the performance of a Self-Storage property with respect to customer service, it is important to measure how we are executing against the best practices that result in the best occupancy and revenue!

There are many customer service “best practices” that most industry experts agree on. Here are a few examples:

- Stand when a customer walks thru our office doors.
- Smile in person and on the phone.
- Be the expert – find a solution for your customer.
- Keep a clean property.
- Keep a maintained property.
- Offer features for security, access and convenience. Cameras, electronic access, free moving carts, etc.
- Offer online access to account information and the ability to make online payments or auto-pay.

During this article, let's talk about four areas that we really need to improve upon in our industry. Each is a customer service best practice. These best practices will help our rentals and our income month after month!

#1 - Assume the Sale!

In most cases, we are all pretty good at customer service. We have all heard the statement "It's not rocket science" with respect to our industry. That statement is true but I would add that although it is not rocket science "it is our rocket – and there are processes that make the difference in the success story of any Self-Storage store. Great customer service is simple...take care of those who seek your business whether through a telephone call, a visit to your store or via the email or your website. With that said, in the storage industry it is important to understand that there is more to just offering customer service – it is getting them to purchase our services! We have to do better, at each store, for each inquiry we come into contact with. As an industry, we have to adapt a "assume the sale" mentality – we have to ask for the sale and close the sale!

Remember, each customer who stops by or calls...NEEDS storage. Otherwise, we would never meet them or hear from them. Think about that...really let it sink in. A person calls us or visits us because they have a need for storage... and we have storage! A best practice is finding a solution to a customer's storage needs. That solution is showing them the right size unit, talking about and showing the customer all the great things about our property and getting them to sign the lease *immediately, the same day!* By getting the customer to sign a lease that day, you have just provided the solution to their storage needs and made life a bit easier for them! It's one less thing for them to worry about! That is great customer service!

Don't be shy about getting them to sign the lease today...remember they NEED storage. You would be surprised how many customers get the unit immediately just because you asked. You would be surprised how many more units you will rent by asking for the sale. I had a manager tell me once that it was their expectation for a customer to sign a lease, why else would they be there? This manager stated that she listens to their needs, shows them a unit that will work and the next size up, gives them a tour of the property and asks for the sale – she says it is a rare occasion that they don't immediately sign a lease. Sometimes she has to overcome an objection, but she does not let that deter her.

If the customer gives you objections to signing the lease, find a solution that gets them to sign it. Right then, right there. If it is price, what can you do? Sometimes it is as easy as waiving the administrative fee, or matching price, sometimes it is a future rental, sometimes it is about giving a move in special or maybe you give them 5 free boxes (think how little money that is!) Making sure your managers “know” what they can do to secure a rental is critical! GET THE RENTAL! Don't let them get away!

#2 – Tenant Protection/Insurance: Make sure they are covered!

Another best practice for great customer service is offering tenant protection. We have all experienced a roof leak or break in. Whether your product is a protection plan or insurance, making sure your customer's goods are protected if something happens is a best practice! Most of our leases in Self-Storage today have a requirement for customer goods protection. It is there for a reason – if an event happens, for example, a break-in or a roof leak, having a solution to the problem is great customer service. Whether they are protected by their own insurance or purchase the stores product – they are protected. Yes, it is an ancillary income producer if they choose our product – what a great way to improve the income of a store and provide a solution if the customers goods are damaged in some way!

#3 – Offering retail merchandise to protect and make the move easier!

A best practice for great customer service is offering the retail items most of us have displayed in our offices. I am always amazed at how much money is spent to place retail items in our stores but then expect the items to jump off the wall and sell themselves! Most of the stores who offer retail merchandise for sale sell boxes, tape and locks more than anything else. That makes sense as most customers who need storage will need to pack or box things up. Remember, the manager is the expert! During your sales presentation, you should always find ways to educate your customer on how those retail items will help them. I know a manager who sells more mattress covers than anything - she told me if someone tells her they are storing a bedroom set, she tells them they will need to cover it. She walks over to her retail wall and asks what size mattress and places it on the counter. She tells them the cover will protect their mattress and after the move, they can use the mattress cover as a large trash bag. So simple, yet so effective.

#4 – Ask for a review!

Our Self-Storage world is becoming more and more competitive. Most customers find us by an internet search – so make sure you are being seen! Google gives favor to those with the most positive reviews. Make sure you have a platform in place that sends an email to customers asking to review their experience. Once you have the platform in place, make sure your manager “asks for the review.” Just like you ask for the sale, you will ask for the review. There is nothing more effective then after you have rented a unit to a customer or a customer has moved out to let them know to expect an email asking for a review. The most effective managers let the customer know they will be receiving an email asking for a review and that it would mean a lot to them if the customer would complete it. There is nothing more effective than the personal ask. If you are giving your customers an incentive to complete a review – stop it. Your reviews should be genuine and honest. Challenge your onsite staff to gain new online reviews to help your digital presence.

Good luck and good renting!