

# 5 Actions to Ensure Customer Service Improvement Initiatives

By Shelley Hall, Catalytic Management LLC

Efforts to improve customer service are often short lived. Companies make a big push, train their teams, and then 90 to 120 days later, the results start to diminish. These all too frequent failures result in many companies declining to even make the effort to deliver differentiated customer service because they don't believe they can sustain the improved service levels over time. If training is all you do to improve your customer service, then you're right – your improved service will not last.

Here are five actions you should take if you want to achieve and sustain great customer service:

## 1. Assess Your Current Service Levels

Uncovering your current service quality is critical to understanding where to focus your improvement efforts. If you don't regularly seek customer input, now's the time to reach out and get their feedback. Use a mystery shopping firm if your business is retail. Ask an outside third party to interview your customers if you're a services firm. Customer surveys should not be the sole assessment tool and they should be more in-depth than a mere smile survey – so don't ignore actually talking to customers.

## 2. Assess your staff

As part of the service assessment you must take an honest look at your employees. Glean information from the customer assessments and ask the outside experts to interview your critical customer facing employees. Clearly understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your team is crucial to determining the focus of your improvement efforts and in determining who may no longer be appropriate for a customer service role.

## 3. Define and Disseminate Specific Service Standards

These standards become the “behavior guide” for your employees and become elements of future performance reviews. Service standards are critical to consistency in service delivery throughout the entire company and insure that evaluating employee service delivery is fair and measurable.

## 4. Train, Train and Train Again

Training must be ongoing, customized to your industry and your customer's needs and must never be the final solution. When you turn to training as the only solution you are destined for lack luster success if not



**Shelley F. Hall** is a highly successful entrepreneur and corporate fugitive who has built, reinvented and turned around companies for the past 20 years. As Principal, Managing Director of Catalytic Management, Shelley delivers velocity driven consulting that accelerates business growth through sales effectiveness, customer loyalty and process improvement. As a thought leader and speaker, Shelley has published dozens of articles for such major business journals as Business Performance Magazine, CEO Refresher, The Handbook of Business Strategy, ManageSmarter, Sales and Service Excellence, Women's Business and many more. Website:

[www.catalyticmanagement.com](http://www.catalyticmanagement.com)

outright failure. Training is not an event – it must a continuous journey. While using a training company for the first and crucial round of training is advisable, training must continue using internal resources. Training should be a component of regular

staff meetings. Managers must seek opportunities to coach for and reward superior service delivery. Lasting results are realized when you have a sustainability strategy

### **5. Develop and Implement a Sustainability Strategy and Tactics**

Consider a “service certification” program with multiple certification levels to encourage continuous personal development. Level I could be successful completion of an on-line quiz based on your standards and training content. Level II could be case study based and focus on *how* the employee would act by asking them to solve problems or

meet a customer’s high expectations. Consider holding quarterly “service conferences” where assigned relevant books or articles are discussed and problems addressed and resolved. The conference need not be more than a few hours, but identifying it as a conference reinforces the importance of service. Consider holding the “mini-conference” off site to add excitement and increase their focus.

### **The Prize is Differentiated Service and Increase Profits**

The energy and effort you commit to your service improvement initiative will determine your success. Taking

the easy way out and depending upon training alone to solve your service challenges is a short term fix that will relegate your initiative to the list of all the other failed efforts that demoralize and frustrate employees. Don’t succumb to the “fix it now” mentality. Lasting fixes that drive customer satisfaction and loyalty take time and thought to develop and deliver.