

# Customer Service as a Way of Life

I'm sitting in a lab lobby waiting to get blood drawn. The receptionist is one of the rudest people I've ever overheard. Every time someone checks in, every word she says is edgy and nasty and she seems to have no tone except one that makes people feel like idiots.

It was like this last time I came here too. I don't know what's going on in her life or why this business allows her to keep her job, but it got me thinking about customer service. How is it learned?

I had several customer facing jobs when I was young, starting with door to door candy bar sales for little league and collecting payments from newspaper subscribers. I don't remember being coached or taught but maybe I was. I do remember feeling nervous and awkward and reading people's responses. I wanted to not make people unhappy, a tall order in door to door sales but easier when you're 10. So I'd see what seemed to get the best responses and adjust. I wasn't consciously systematic most of the time, just adjusting to the situation.

Over time, I learned lots of little things that worked every time. I got good at it. I practiced more running the concessions and pro shop at a small golf course then bagging groceries. Then I installed internet and phone systems at car dealerships and learned to deal with higher profile people in higher stress situations.

The apex of my customer service work was as a legislative assistant to a state representative. Most of the day was spent on the phone and email and physical mail between me (speaking in the voice of my boss half the time) and truly crazy, angry, or delusional people with an occasional nut job for balance. I turned it into a game and tried to find a way to make people happy while being disagreed with. I got good at it.

The ability to interact with lots of people and leave them feeling good after the interaction is really powerful. When I did fundraising for a non profit these skills with receptionist and assistants and gatekeepers worked magic on helping me get meetings.

I'm not sure why some people seem to learn customer service skills and some don't. It really baffles me. I wish I could crack the code.

Oh, as an aside, say what you will about the U.S., but the customer service in this country is typically about ten times better than any other place I've been, save maybe heavily touristy places in Africa. Mises said under capitalism consumer kings rule. It feels so good to be made to feel like a king for merely existing. Vegas is probably the greatest example of this.