

Customer Service and Employee Owners

What does it mean to be an employee owner?

Employee ownership means that **employees** own stock in the company. Unlike publicly traded companies where stocks can be bought and sold on the open market, an **employee** earns stocks gradually as the **employee stock ownership** plan (ESOP) buys the company from the original **owners**.

To put it very briefly, ESOPs are an attractive employee benefit, giving workers ownership interest in the company and, ultimately, serving as a qualified retirement plan.

Employee-owned companies and employee-owners aren't the only beneficiaries of ESOPs — their customers may notice a few perks, too:

- **Customer service is naturally improved.** Customers receive better service when shopping at an employee-owned business. Employees have a vested interest in the company, the work they produce — and the success of that work — is transferred to the customer through the employee's commitment and dedication to them — going above what's expected and providing the customer with the best experience possible. After all, we want customers to shop with us. Increase Sales equals Increased Profits equals Increase in Employee's Stock Value.
- **Employee-owners are more engaged, resulting in better familiarity with products that we sell, where they are located not to mention and the hows and whys of running our company.** It's important that we know where products are located, why we don't carry every brand/item, why there are holes on the shelves, etc. Ask questions. Be informed. Share your knowledge. It makes a difference.
- **Customers can expect consistency because of the employee owner commitment to the company's success.** After all, we are working for not only the company's financial future, but ours as well.

So as employee owners let's look at the basics of our customer service program:

1. **First Impression** - When providing great customer service, we must be conscious of the image we project. Part of that image is established and maintained by our appearance. Employees must report to work each day in a clean, spotless and wrinkle-free uniform. Employees are to maintain the uniform in good repair at all times. If you have any questions regarding our Appearance Standards please ask your Store Director.
2. **Welcoming the Customer** - Your customer service greeting is not just acknowledging that there's a body in the store. A true greeting in delivering good customer service is like welcoming a close friend. Engage your customer immediately by simply interacting with them in a way that shows that you care about their needs and have the knowledge to help them. And don't forget to SMILE — at every customer you see.

3. **Interacting with the Customer** – When you're talking with someone look them in the eye. It lets them know that you are paying attention to them. If a customer is in your area – start a conversation with them. Ask them if they found everything. Remember – If they need directions to a product take them there. Be sincere with your interactions with our customers. Listen to what they're saying – don't assume you know what they want, what their problem is.... only they do.
4. **Personal Attention.** Don't be afraid to go up to our regular customers and introduce yourself and ask if they're finding everything OK, or how their day is going. Customers will feel very special that you took the time to talk to them. You don't need to have a lengthy conversation (many customers would much rather you kept it short). Just give a brief introduction and tell the customer if they need any help to let you know.
5. **Get to Know Your Regulars.** Regular customers are the backbone of our success. Get to know their names, spouse's name, kids' name. Show the customer that you enjoy seeing them (not just their wallet) and make them feel at home.
6. **Address Problems Immediately.** Inevitably you will encounter customer complaints. Don't shy away from them. Instead, acknowledge the problem and offer some type of solution, whether it's offering to replace an item, or bringing it to someone else's attention.
7. **The All Important Thank you** - Doesn't matter if it's at the register or down the aisles – always close the conversation with a sincere "Thank You".

So remember – delivering great customer service will show our customers that you care and it will keep them coming back for more.