



# The Customer Rules: The 39 Essential Rules for Delivering Sensational Service

By Lee Cockerell

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The former EVP of Walt Disney World shares indispensable Rules for serving customers with consistency, efficiency, creativity, sincerity, and excellence. Lee Cockerell knows that success in business – any business - depends upon winning and keeping customers.

In 39 digestible, bite-sized chapters, Lee shares everything he has learned in his 40+ year career in the hospitality industry about creating an environment that keeps customers coming back for more. Here, Lee not only shows why the customer always rules, but also the Rules for serving customers so well they'll never want to do business with anyone but you. For example:

Rule #1: Customer Service Is Not a Department

Rule #3: Great Service Follows the Laws of Gravity

Rule #5: Ask Yourself "What Would Mom Do?"

Rule #19: Be a Copycat

Rule #25: Treat Every Customer like a Regular

Rule #39: Don't Try Too Hard

As simple as they are profound, these principles have been shown to work in companies as large as Disney and as small as a local coffee shop; from businesses selling cutting-edge technologies like computer tablets to those selling products as timeless as shoes and handbags; at corporations as long-standing as Ford Motors and those as nascent as a brand new start-up. And they have been proven indispensable at all levels of a company, from managers responsible for hiring and training employees, setting policies and procedures, and shaping the company culture to front line staff who deal directly with clients and customers

Chock-full of universal advice, applicable online and off, *The Customer Rules* is the essential handbook for service excellence everywhere.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"At Zappos, many of our business decisions revolve around the customer. Lee Cockerell understands the importance of a great customer experience and shows you how to Deliver Happiness to your customers."  
-Tony Hsieh, NY Times bestselling author of "Delivering Happiness" and CEO of Zappos.com, Inc.

"These Rules rule. If you play by these rules you will win." – Carl Sewell, Chairman of Sewell Automotive Companies and author of the million copy bestseller *Customers for Life*"

"The Customer Rules is easy to read and understand, but profound in so many ways! If companies and leaders would follow this advice their customers and business would be significantly better." -Al Weiss, Former President, Disney Parks and Resorts, Worldwide

"I don't know many people who know more about customer service than Lee Cockerell. If you want to create raving fans and have customers brag about you, read his book, *The Customer Rules*. It will send you in the right direction.- Ken Blanchard, co-author, *The One Minute Manager* and *Leading at a Higher Level*

"No matter what industry you're in or what kind of company you work for, if customer service isn't priority, your business will get crushed. This book shows that any employee at any level of an organization can take pride in serving customers with excellence – in doing so they bolster both their career and their company profits!" -Marshall Goldsmith – *New York Times* bestselling author of *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*.

"Lee Cockerell offers practical, reader friendly suggestions and guidelines which can be implemented immediately to enhance and improve customer service at any company."  
-Fred Whyte, President, STIHL Incorporated

"Lee Cockerell has written a wise and practical book chock full of ideas about delivering sensational service. He illustrates his lessons with engaging stories about real-life people doing extraordinary things for others. I love it." -Mark Sanborn, Bestselling author of *The Fred Factor*

#### About the Author

**Lee Cockerell** is the author of *Creating Magic, 10 Common Sense Leadership Strategies from a Life at Disney*. He is the former Executive Vice President of Operations of Walt Disney World and has held executive positions at Hilton Hotels and Marriott. During his distinguished career in the hospitality industry Cockerell earned a worldwide reputation as an expert on the customer experience.

Cockerell currently travels the country addressing audiences at Fortune 100 companies; educational institutions and non-profits; and government agencies, including the US military.

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## Rule #1

### Customer Service Is Not a Department

If there's one thing I've learned in my forty-plus years in the business world, it's that customer service is far more than a department name or a desk that shoppers or clients go to with problems and complaints. It's not a website, or a phone number, or an option on a pre-recorded phone menu. Nor is it a task or a chore. It's a personal responsibility. And it's not the responsibility only of people called customer service reps. It's the responsibility of everyone in the organization, from the CEO to the newest and lowest-ranking frontline employee. In fact, everyone in the company should be thought of as a customer service rep, because in one way or another each of them has some impact on, and bears some responsibility for, the quality of the customer experience. Even if you never see or speak to a customer (or potential customer), you need to treat everyone with whom you interact--your vendors, your creditors, your suppliers, and so on--with sincerity and respect. Trust me, the great service you give them will ultimately trickle down to your customers.

Great service serves bottom-line business objectives. Sounds simple, but I constantly meet executives who don't understand that. They say things like "I'm in the commodity business, and it's all about the product." I tell them that they'd better have a great product, because the most extraordinary customer service in the world won't compensate for a bad one. But then I tell them that unless their product is the only one of its kind on the planet (and will always be the only one), good quality alone won't guarantee long-term profits. Time and again, customer service has been shown to be the best way to distinguish an outstanding company or organization from its competitors. Let's face it, no matter what business or industry you're in, there's probably someone--or many someones--who offers more or less the same product or service you do. But if you provide the same product plus personal service that feels authentic, you will have a leg up. No matter what business you're in, great service is a competitive advantage that costs you little or nothing but adds huge value for your customer. And it's one advantage you can't afford to pass up, because in today's highly competitive marketplace your customers will leave you in a heartbeat if your service doesn't measure up. Don't take my word for it; look at the research. In one study, customers were asked why they stopped doing business with a company. Forty-three percent named "negative experience with a staff person" as the main reason for taking their business elsewhere, and 30 percent said they moved on because they were made to feel they were not a valued customer.

My point is that most people expect quality products and services. It's the lowest common denominator. But if your company gives people the products or services they want and customer service that exceeds their expectations, you have an unbeatable combination, and one your competition can't easily imitate. Don't get confused about the difference between the services you sell and customer service. Services are what consumers come to you for and pay for. Customer service encompasses the entire experience, from the moment a person logs on to your website or walks through your front door until the moment they log off or walk out. It's what brings the human factor into a transaction. Some hardened number types scoff at the notion of the human factor. But as I've learned over the course of decades working at some of the most profitable companies in the world, the emotional element is as important as--even more important than--the money that changes hands. That is why it should be delivered not just competently, but with ultimate respect, sincerity, and care.

Some managers and executives turn up their noses at the whole idea of service. They believe it's too "soft" for someone in their position of importance to think about, what with all the decisions they have to make and bottom lines they have to meet and the competitors breathing down their necks. Creating better products, building fresh ad campaigns, pioneering new technologies or markets--those tasks feel sexy to them. They

get their juices flowing. To them, customer service is a department. It's something they can delegate to nice people who get along well with others. They couldn't be more misguided.

That is why everyone in a company should be considered part of the customer service department. Several years ago, when I was in charge of operations at Disney World, we changed the title of our frontline managers to "guest service manager" and required them to get out of the office and spend 80 percent of their shift in the operations, providing service support to their direct reports. Overnight, our guest satisfaction scores rose sharply. So whether you're the CEO, a midlevel manager, or the head of a small department, give your team members--and yourself!--responsibilities and titles that reflect their role in pleasing the customer.

Great service does not cost any more money than average or poor service. Yet the returns it delivers are spectacular. So invest in your company's commitment to service by making it part of every employee's job description and the guiding light of your entire operation.

## Rule #2

### You Win Customers One at a Time and Lose Them a Thousand at a Time

There's an old saying in business: "You win customers one at a time, and you lose them one at a time." It's outdated. In the age of social media, you can easily lose customers a thousand--even a million--at a time. With a few keystrokes, one unhappy, frustrated, ticked-off customer can now tell her whole email list, all her Facebook friends, and everyone who reads her blog or follows her on Twitter why they should not do business with you. She can voice her outrage into a smartphone and put it up on YouTube with clever graphics. With a little creativity, she can even go Michael Moore on you and shoot a mini-documentary, complete with music and special effects, and generate enough viral buzz to do serious damage to your business. One major airline found this out the hard way when they made soldiers returning from Afghanistan pay baggage fees for their fourth bag. The soldiers made a video of the incident and put it up on YouTube. Within a day, the airline received thousands of complaints and was forced to back down.

True, satisfied customers can also spread the word about what they like about a company. But will they? Maybe, if they're truly blown away by how great you are. But angry people are far more motivated to shout about their feelings, and furious exposés get a lot more attention than glowing testimonials. Humans are wired to pay more attention to the negative than the positive--it's an evolutionary mechanism designed to keep us safe from danger. It's why drivers slow down to look at car wrecks, not at Good Samaritans helping someone fix a flat tire. It's why we remember warnings a lot better than we do recommendations. It's built into our DNA.

I know about that dynamic from my own experience. I see good service all the time, but I don't always go out of my way to write about it. However, when that same major airline once greeted a reasonable request of mine with a shocking and immediate "No," I quickly posted a detailed description of my experience on my website blog.

Here's what happened. I had decided to combine some speaking engagements with a vacation for my wife and me, plus my son, his wife, and their three kids. The arrangement involved flying from Orlando to Boston, then on to Paris, and later from Paris to Johannesburg, South Africa, before returning to Orlando. I booked the flights through the airline, and let me tell you it was not cheap. About a month before the trip, I received an attractive invitation to give a speech in Boston. All it required was a slight change in my travel

schedule. Not wanting to give up the opportunity or the fee, I told the rep that I wanted to cancel the Orlando to Boston segment of my itinerary and then board the Boston to Paris flight with my current ticket. That's all. I didn't ask for any money back for the unused flight. I didn't want to rearrange any of the other six tickets. I just wanted not to get on one of the flights. I was even willing to pay more, because fares had gone up since I'd bought the tickets. Their answer: "No." I spoke to several customer reps, and all I got was a chorus of "No." Why? Because it's their policy. You can't change anything. If you're not on the Orlando to Boston flight, we will cancel the rest of your ticket, they told me. In other words, I had a choice: Either turn down the speaking opportunity or cancel my entire vacation. It is hard to imagine a dumber policy or a more self-defeating response to a request. I now fly with that airline only when there is no other way to get to my destination, even though I've accumulated so many frequent-flier miles with them that I'm often upgraded. But the upgrade is just one of their services, like online check-in. They don't seem to understand the difference between services like those and respectful, competent customer service with a human touch.

In my own small way, I am sending a message to that airline that shoddy service exacts a high cost. I tell that story in my speeches and workshops, often contrasting it with happy stories of flying other airlines that consistently do a great job of customer service.

The point is, every time a customer comes into contact with your business, whether in person, on the phone, or on your website, it's a moment of truth. Your reputation is about to get either better or worse. If you do something to tick off your customer at that moment of truth, you can bet hers won't be the only business you lose. Do something that adds value at that moment of truth, and he will look forward to coming back and will tell others about you. Do something that adds a lot of value, and that customer might be so stunned by your sincere, thoughtful, friendly, resourceful service that she'll go straight to her computer and tell the world. Satisfied customers are the best marketing staff you can possibly have. They, not your advertisements, are your true messengers. If that airline's service was half as good as its commercials, I would still be a happy customer.

### Rule #3

#### Great Service Follows the Law of Gravity

It's a simple law of nature: The service ethos starts at the top. From there, it works its way down to every level of an organization. This is not a mere trickle-down effect; it flows quickly and surely, more like a waterfall than a faucet.

Whenever you see truly great service, whether it's from a local coffee shop or a global fast-food chain, a small financial services firm or a multinational bank, a rural clinic or a gigantic city hospital, it's a good bet that a senior person has made customer service an integral part of his or her strategy. Unless the people at the top of an organization, division, or department are dedicated to developing and maintaining superior service, it won't happen. They have to create the right agenda, allocate the necessary resources, establish the appropriate priorities, and set the proper tone. The best of those leaders also serve as role models, demonstrating the attributes of great service with every word, action, and communication--not just with customers, but with suppliers, colleagues, employees, and everyone else who has an impact on the way business is done.

In my experience, the leaders of companies that don't provide good service--the companies that consumers complain about the most--usually have the least people-oriented strategy. Their focus is on products, sales,



marketing, and other business concerns. Those are all vital, of course, but in today's world they're not enough to drive long-term success. Managers have to recognize that sustained profits depend on their ability to generate consistent, ongoing, excellent service that keeps customers coming back and singing their praises.

During my career, I worked for three companies where sensational service generated spectacular business results: Hilton, Marriott, and Disney. In all those places, the service ethos flowed from the top. At Walt Disney World, for instance, when Judson Green, the head of parks and resorts, decided to radically change the corporate culture, he stood up in front of seven thousand managers in Orlando and told them exactly what he wanted to see happen. Then he went to Disneyland in California and on to France and Japan, laying out the same vision for the employees in each of those facilities. As someone who played a major role in designing and executing the plan, I can tell you that Judson's 100 percent commitment was contagious--as was mine and that of every other leader, at every level and at every stage of the rollout. Slowly but surely, everyone in the company learned that just having outstanding parks and the most recognized name in recreation and entertainment was not enough. Customers also need the emotional satisfaction of being treated like the most important people in the world. That add-on essentially became the Disney World brand.

No matter what your role or title, you can do a lot more to spread the ethos of service in your department, or within your own team, than you might think you can. Yes, the law of service gravity begins at the top, but the top is wherever you are. If you go to work every morning focused on customer service, you'll be surprised how powerful your example is and how quickly your mind-set will flow to those both under and around you. Remember, role modeling is by far the best teacher, and you are being watched every second of the day.

A few years ago, I read a book titled *Leading Out Loud*. It had a big impact on me. Its basic premise is that great leaders speak loudly and often about what they want their organizations to focus on and what employees are expected to do to achieve those goals. It's not unlike parenting. All parents know that they have to speak up over and over again to make sure their children understand and adopt the right values, behaviors, and social skills.

Whether it's raising children to grow up with integrity and respect for themselves and others or inspiring employees and colleagues to serve customers with excellence, you have to lead out loud. It will be a win-win for everyone concerned: you, your team, your customers, and everyone with a stake in your bottom line.

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**Dana Barker:**

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One particular activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love The Customer Rules: The 39 Essential Rules for Delivering Sensational Service, it is possible to enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout people. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

**Daniel Adams:**

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