

# Unbeatable

# Customer Service

By Patti Komara

**G**ym owners spend thousands of dollars to attract new customers. But, it is just as important to keep the customers we have—shutting the back door, if you will. When we create a relationship with a customer, we create a loyal customer. Loyalty turns into positive “word of mouth.” This loyalty equation is necessary to create lasting relationships as well as gain new students.

Here are five reasons customers will choose your gym and surprisingly price is last:

- 1 Need-** Customers should feel they need what your gym offers. Do your marketing materials convey the BENEFITS of gymnastics such as fitness, self-confidence building, and athletic development for all sports? Or, do you just mention that you have a 44' x 44' super-duper spring floor and a 35' long Tumb-Trak? In reality, do those two things matter to the average consumer?
- 2 Confidence-** Do you have a great reputation for fairness and cleanliness? Do your marketing materials convey the pride you have in your gym?
- 3 Quality-** Is your gym known for the highest quality in the three main areas – staff, facility, and curriculum?
- 4 Selection-** Are you offering preschool classes in the evening or on weekends? Do you offer a unique combination class of gymnastics and dance?
- 5 Price-** If you offer the lowest tuition in the area, your gym will not thrive. You need adequate capital to maintain the quality needed for long-term success. People will pay a premium price if they are getting a premium product or service. This is the very reason that stores like Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue stay in business.

Problems or obstacles can be turned into opportunities to build customer loyalty. For example, all gyms struggle with “make-up classes” when a customer misses a class. At our gym, we allow the students to make up as many classes as they wish in the summer. We service about 400 make up classes in July alone. During the school year, our policy is to allow a student one make up class per 8-week session. This rule is on the registration form. It is written in the parent handbook. Additionally, parents are reminded of the policy when they call to schedule a make up class. We even have the rule on signs posted in the gym lobby.

However, Mrs. Smith never knew about this policy. Her daughter Rachel was sick last week. The week before last, Rachel had a band concert. Oh, there was also that soccer practice that she could not miss. Now, Mrs. Smith wants to know if Rachel can make up all of

the classes she missed. You now have to choose whether to “stick to your guns” or use this scenario as an opportunity to create an honest, human relationship with Mrs. Smith. The office staff at my gym is empowered to make decisions like this every day. Any one of my 12 secretaries would tell Mrs. Smith, “I understand. As you know, our policy is to allow only one makeup class per 8-week session. But, you are such a good customer--let’s see what we can do. Three make-ups seem to be a lot, but I’ll set Rachel up for two make-up classes.” Now, Mrs. Smith is clearly aware of the policy but will most likely value your flexibility. The secretary has developed a relationship with Mrs. Smith while “sticking to her guns.”



Let’s look at four customer needs that help create relationships:

- 1 To Feel Welcomed-** A customer needs to feel welcomed in your gym from their initial telephone call. Every day, the office staff at my gym looks over our “new students list” to ensure that they warmly welcome the new students and their parents. Welcoming new students by name is very powerful!
- 2 To Feel Important-** Everyone has a sign under his or her shirt that shouts, “Make me feel important!” Everyone listens to the same radio station-WIIFM, What’s In It For Me?
- 3 To Feel Comfortable-** Supplying customers with a safe and child-friendly facility can make parents and students feel comfortable in your gym. At my gym, we offer a television in the lobby for parents and children to watch their favorite movies. We also give every new student a free “intro class.” This is a free 20-minute class with a teacher who goes through the names of the main skills they will learn and the different gymnastics positions such as straddle, pike, tuck, etc.
- 4 To Feel Understood-** If a problem arises, gym owners and customer service representatives need to feel and express empathy. If a customer has a problem, bring him or her into your office or to a quiet location in your gym and listen to the customer’s concern. Repeat back what

they said. Ask the customer what you can do to fix the problem. Then, try to do it.

Stu Leonard's Dairy Store is famous for their customer service. His customer service slogan consists of two rules:

**1. The customer is always right.**

**2. If you are not sure what to do, refer to rule number 1.**

We have customer service slogans at our gym. This is the first thing asked at every office staff celebration. Two of my favorites are: "Please the customer" and "Give the customer what they expect and more." What does a customer expect in a gymnastics school?

- Correct information on the phone or website. A clean colorful facility, to be greeted warmly and treated with respect, a workable schedule, small class size, kindness towards their children, excellent curriculum, pre- and post-class association with the parents, and remembering their names.
- Preschool students expect to have fun and to be treated kindly.
- School-age students expect to learn skills and for the staff to take an interest in them.
- Team members and their families expect to win!
- Success is directly related to how often we meet and exceed these expectations.

Customer service has to become second nature at your gym. It has to be a feeling that permeates throughout the staff. The customer is our boss and we have been hired to please them. Remember students do not quit for one reason. They quit when their expectations are not met time and time again. When you chip away at customer satisfaction time after time, the customers will leave. Your success is entirely related to how often you meet the expectations of your customers. Remember the customer is your boss.

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*Patti Komara has produced more than 50 training DVDs and tapes in the area of business and teaching gymnastics for all ages. She also has lesson plan books for preschool, dance, school-age gymnastics, and nursery schools. View her online catalog at [www.tumblebear.com](http://www.tumblebear.com) or call (219) 865-2274 for a catalog.*