

Customer Intimacy

When did service cease being a part of customer service? We might as well forget the notion of actually speaking to a real person. These days you're lucky to get beyond a computerized "human" voice on the other end of the phone. Worse yet, many companies are going the route of Amazon.com—where customer service is accepted via email *only*. Need to call the US Postal Service to get a tracking number for your package? Good luck! The automated system requires a tracking number up front. Have a question about your credit card statement? They'll require you punch in all of your account information to kick off the call, only to ask you for the same information again when a rep finally gets on the line.

What is it about customer service today that is so alarming? It lacks intimacy. We already know that intimacy is critical to building a good relationship with customers—it only takes a 5% boost in customer loyalty to see a 60% increase in profit—but we often neglect the fact that relationships require people. And *strong* relationships with your customers can only come from people who are skilled at relating to them.

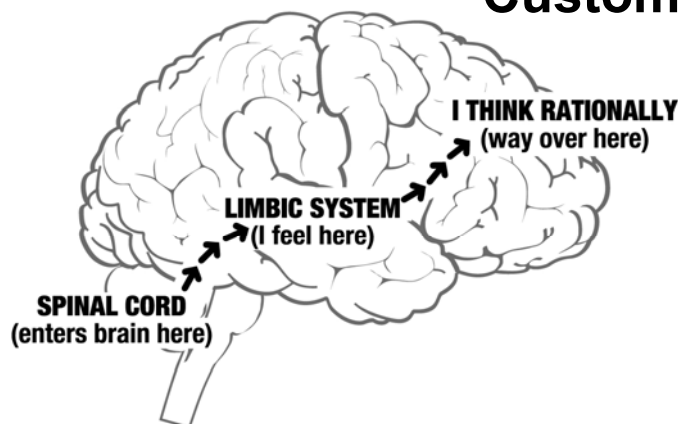
If your employees are to create intimacy for your customers, your service reps must harness their emotional intelligence—the unique blend of feeling and reason that enables us to read people and respond effectively. The emotional intelligence of your workforce not only breeds customer intimacy—emotional intelligence is a skill set that anyone can learn.

Industry leaders such as T-Mobile are beginning to reap the benefits that come with increased employee emotional intelligence. By training customer service representatives in emotional intelligence skills, T-Mobile has been able to reduce attrition and absenteeism in the department by 50%, while tripling productivity.

The difference between customer service and customer intimacy is purely emotional. Customer intimacy is achieved when customers feel heard—they are treated as if their experiences and opinions are important. Your customers will only feel this way about your company when your employees possess the emotional mastery to take them there. Placating customer requests is hardly service, and it certainly doesn't produce intimacy. Reps have to listen, validate customer concerns, and get what is "really" going on.

The line between customer service and customer intimacy is a thin one. It is a difficult line for most people to walk. Turnover rates for customer service positions are exceedingly high. The primary reasons new service reps fail are interpersonal, not technical: 26% fail because they can't accept feedback, and another 23% fail because they're unable to understand and manage emotions—their own and those of their customers.

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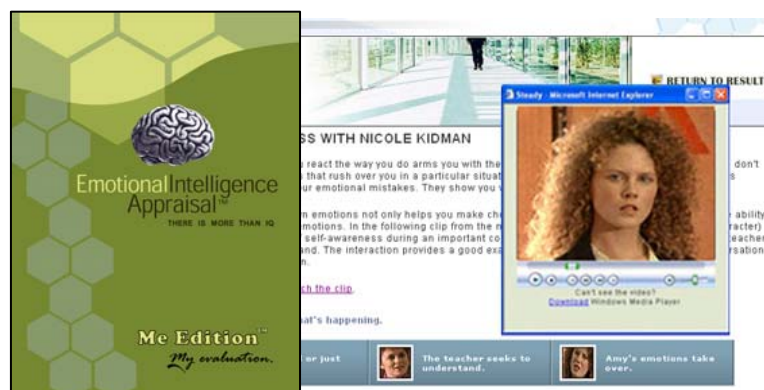


Why do so many service reps fail? When we are faced with customers who are angry or confused, our brains are structured such that we fully experience the anxiety or irritation of the moment before anything else. The emotional center in our brain begins processing what's in front of us before the rational part of the brain gets a crack at choosing how to respond. Many reps are unaware of this process, unaware of their emotions, and don't recognize the impact of their reactions to their customers. Customer service reps have to build their emotional intelligence skills before they can improve their performance, and develop the kind of intimacy that keeps customers coming back for more.

If what you're reading here describes people at your company, rest assured you aren't alone. TalentSmart®'s global research with hundreds of thousands of people discovered that only 30% of us are able to accurately identify our emotions as they happen, and more than 70% of us experience great difficulty handling the conflict and stress that inevitably surface at work. For those in the service positions, there's no doubt that much of this stress is experienced with customers.

We all know it's important to seek to understand situations first, before charging ahead to judge them. Wouldn't it be smart to use this strategy in training your customer service reps? Before concluding that you have reps who just can't manage, let them take the *Emotional Intelligence Appraisal™* to prove otherwise. It's a quick and accurate way to measure and develop emotional intelligence as in Daniel Goleman's model. The test takes just seven minutes, and the results include more than 10 hours of e-learning targeted to their unique score profiles.

Best of all, the e-learning features clips from Hollywood movies, television, and memorable historical events to teach emotional intelligence through action. Good customer service comes with practice. Give your reps a chance to put their emotional intelligence to work.



Call now to purchase it for just \$39!

- Available online.
- Includes our Goal Tracking System™ to help you monitor and share your progress.
- Compare your scores to others' worldwide!

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Lac D. Su is the Director of Strategic Alliances for TalentSmart®, the leading provider of emotional intelligence tests, products, and training. He forms and manages relationships with key TalentSmart® resellers and assists clients with the implementation of skill development initiatives.

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Dr. Bradberry is the President of TalentSmart® and a recognized expert in emotional intelligence, who speaks regularly on the topic in corporate and public settings. He is an avid researcher and has conducted several large-scale studies examining leadership and emotional intelligence across industry lines.

Dr. Bradberry is the coauthor of the *Emotional Intelligence Quick Book*, as well as the *Preferred Leader Assessment™* with Ken Blanchard. Dr. Bradberry's work has been featured by *Newsweek*, *MSNBC*, *The Washington Post*, *Glamour*, *Health*, *Reader's Digest* and major television and radio outlets, including ABC, CBS, NBC, NPR, and FOX.

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