

Tips for Great Customer Service

The tips I offer in this document you should find useful in improving your customer service and working more effectively as a valued member of my contractor network. As you may know, my intention when I started this service in March 2011 was to serve area homeowners through connecting them with great contractors (whether they use my service or use my educational material to help them select the right contractor on their own). For my mission to be successful for the homeowner who uses my service, it requires both me and my network contractors to be customer service focused. If either of us fails in this mission, we all fail in the eyes of the customer. This means that I will “favor” those contractors who not only provide the homeowner great value, but also great service which includes timely and effective communications with the customer. As I have mentioned before, I find that serving as a third party between my network contractors and their leads/customers allows me the unique opportunity to learn about the likes and dislikes of the customer regarding their interrelationship with the contractor. Here are a few of items at the top of the list of customer expectations which I find tend to be areas where many contractors need improvement. You will need to evaluate your own performance to determine if you believe you need to possibly improve in any specific area. The customer feedback that I pass along to my contractors should be seriously considered in determining improvement opportunity areas.

Before I list these top items, I will tell you that the customer will seldom tell the contractor why they did not select them for a given job so the contractor may draw incorrect conclusions as to the reason. And, I can tell you it is NOT about price as many contractors assume, but in many cases it’s the “little things” that fall within the overall service category. When I know without a doubt based on customer input why a contractor was ruled out, I will share the information with you. I know it can be difficult to receive “negative” information, but please understand that I am just the messenger. If I mention, for example, that the customer is coming to me because they haven’t yet received the proposal/estimate, it is NOT me who is complaining, it’s just me trying to help you to work with the customer. So with that said, here is a list of considerations you should evaluate to determine if you truly provide top notch service and will be considered one of my “go to” contractors.

- 1) When working an order that I have assigned, it is critical the customer is contacted within the time frames I mentioned to the customer and the contractor. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard from the customer the reason why they selected a given contractor is because they were the quickest to contact them. Whether right or wrong, many customers feel the contractor quickest to

contact them and follow through with the appointment or scheduling is the one they feel wants the work the most and believes provides better overall service. As a reminder, for most job orders I inform the customer (and the contractor) that contact will be made by no later than the next business day after an order is placed (if I receive before 5 PM). This requires you to monitor your text messages and respond back to me that you received and also giving me a quick “I got it” to the email with the job order. As you will see below, I never take it for granted that any important digital communications I send are received unless I receive confirmation.

- 2) Setting and following through with the appointment (where applicable) is critical. Most customers understand that sometimes stuff happens and if for example an appointment needs to be rescheduled, they expect to get a call (even if the contractor is going to be 15 minutes or so late).
- 3) I have found this one to be one of the bigger problems... If the customer is not specifically told when they can expect to receive the proposal/estimate, they will have their own assumptions and it typically is quicker than most contractors turnaround. And, for whatever reason, they seem to come to me to ask/complain when they don't receive the proposal when they expected it. I always encourage customer to call the contractor directly, however, for some reason they hesitate to do this and expect that I can obtain better results in getting a status update. What I also find is that the customer is often not told when they can expect to receive the proposal (or they forget). This one offers a simple solution and that is to make it very clear to the customer when the latest date they can expect to receive the proposal. You may even want to follow-up with a quick courtesy email the evening of the appointment date to thank them and remind them of the date they can expect to receive the proposal (trust me – this simple step will *significantly* improve your odds of getting the job). To wrap this one up, I can tell you that I had a recent angry homeowner complain (and blame me) for assigning what she felt were incompetent contractors because two of my contractors never followed up with a proposal. I then tried to follow-up with both of these contractors daily over a one week period with absolutely no response. Needless to say, this is not the kind of performance that any of us want in a network contractors because it reflects badly on our overall team.
- 4) Also in regards to proposals, I can tell you that you cannot be assured the customer has received or read the proposal, especially if it is sent via email. In most of these instances, the customer just missed the email and in some cases it is sent to their SPAM folder because of filters in email services. I also have seen a few instances where I subsequently found the contractor mistyped or misread the email address. The easiest solution to this problem is to simply request an “I got it” response from the customer and if you don't get their response in a day or two, I would suggest a

follow-up call. I know that many contractors have lost out on bids simply because they assume the customer was not interested and I subsequently find out the customer tells me they never received the bid for a given contractor and simply assumed they were either not interested or they were not competent. I was even told by one customer that they told a friend who was in need of the same services to NOT use one of my contractors because they never followed through on sending the proposal. I subsequently found out the problem was an email address typo by the contractor. The customer understood the simple mistake, but it was too late to salvage either that job or a possible job with the friend.

- 5) As one last recommendation regarding job proposals/estimates. As a general rule, the more detail provided in a proposal the better. It protects both the contractor and the homeowner by helping to ensure a clear understanding of job expectations. I have had a few instances where there have been conflicts because the customer had a certain expectation which was not met only to find that the problem was the proposal was not clear and specific. You will find spending a little more time in detailing the proposal could eliminate potential problems down the road.
- 6) As a general comment, the better you keep me informed of the status (e.g. initial customer contact, appointment scheduling, job scheduling and completion) the better I can help you. The customers expect me to know the status (which I do request as you know from my contractors) so when they come to me with their questions and concerns, the customer can be better served if I am informed. This communication includes providing me a copy of the proposal when you provide to the customer. If you send the proposal via email, simply copy me on the email. As you know, I only need very quick updates on statuses whether it through a brief email or a text message.

I hope you find these tips helpful in improving your customer service and in turn improving your business and bottom line. I have been in the customer service business for many years and I believe I am in a position to help my network contractors. So when I pass along my “experiences” and customer provided information and complaints, my sole purpose is to help you and ultimately as a team prove to the customer that my network contractors are truly the “best of the best”.

To you success!

Tony Messeri

Owner/President

The Homeowner's Helper

