

# ***How customer friendly am I really?***

*A practical guide to more customer satisfaction*



Jeannette Biesbroeck

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## Foreword

*I first met Jeannette Biesbroeck in the summer of 1985, when she joined the major international tour operator for which at that time I had already been working for 12 years. I was in the operations office in awe of those out on the road with direct contact to the clients. During the passage of 46 years, I became vice president of that company, in charge of training and looking after the men and women on the front line dealing with the company's clients. Jeannette joined a team of highly reputed tour and cruise managers looking after large groups of clients touring Europe by motorcoach or cruising Europe's rivers. A team highly reputed for their expert knowledge of Europe, highly reputed for caring. Caring to deliver what the company advertised, caring to deliver the holiday of a lifetime the guests were hoping for, and caring for each individual's wellbeing. Jeannette fit right in - she brought all these qualities to her job, as well as a friendly and cheerful personality, and a willingness to always help however she was needed.*

*This was the philosophy of the Company we both worked for - and the Company respected not only their associates, but also their suppliers along the way, so that in turn they could and would care for the clients. The two are strongly intertwined. If you are dealing with people, wherever you are, whatever your position, the first rule is listen. The second rule is watch. The third is communicate.*

*Whether you are touring with a group of 40 people, or sailing with 160, whether you are greeting a hotel guest or selling an item, in order to make your clients' dreams come true, you need to listen and understand his or her expectations.*

*Often it is the small things that make the big impact. Remembering a guest's name, or some small incident of which he or she has spoken. Going that extra mile for a seemingly small thing that makes an unforgettable experience for the guest. Empathy. A smile. Almost always you will be rewarded by a genuinely grateful and satisfied client. In this book, Jeannette shares many of her personal experiences and explains what made the difference.*

*Those who work on the frontline, have an advantage over all those who work in a back office - you get instant gratification for the effort you are making. You are there to see the gratitude of the person you have helped, see the smile that is returned. You can instantly evaluate if you have delivered a 'job well done', or disappointed your client.*

*And often you still have a chance to make good.*

*Jeannette has always been exemplary in all aspects of her responsibilities towards her clients. She cares. She listens. She watches. She always goes that extra mile.*

*I am honored to endorse this book - having worked closely with Jeannette for over 30 years, and knowing the reviews we received from her clients, I cannot think of anyone more worthy than she, to pass on her knowledge and most considerable experience of how to care for clients. Because it does not matter whether you have a group of clients or an individual in front of you, or if you are dealing with them remotely over the internet. If you can make each one feel listened to and understood, you are bound to succeed. Read 'How customer friendly am I really?' and you will be best-equipped to be a winner!*

*Sabine Steffen*

*Vice President (retired) Tourama Limited. Mallorca, Spain. January 2021*

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	9
<b>1. The importance of a good first impression</b> .....	13
Customer friendliness starts at the front door .....	13
A warm welcome is half the work .....	14
How does the customer experience your business.....	16
On site at the customer's .....	19
The digital host: your website .....	21
<b>2. Who leads the customer journey and what is involved?</b> .....	27
Attention and engagement .....	27
Expertise and tailored advice.....	32
Welcoming the customer without prejudice.....	34
Clear promises that are kept.....	36
Obstacles: get them out of the way.....	37
<b>3. Customer friendly communication</b> .....	41
Conveying information.....	41
Face-to-face conversation and the importance of body language	44
Telephone call and video calling.....	46
Written communication .....	49
Staying visible to the customer.....	52
<b>4. Customer friendliness in every fiber of your business</b> .....	57
Definition and training .....	57
Building a team.....	61
The newcomer.....	62
Internal Communication .....	63
A winning team .....	66
<b>5. The power of the extra mile</b> .....	71
An extra mile with pride and joy.....	71
Wherein lies that extra mile?.....	72
What does the extra mile bring you?.....	80
Nurture your loyal customers.....	81
Extra miles before and after.....	83
<b>6. Take advantage of reviews and complaints</b> .....	89
The right questions lead to the right information .....	89
Review sites.....	92
Troublesome customers and complaining customers.....	94
Handling complaints.....	97
Prevention is better than cure.....	100
<b>7. Summary</b> .....	103
<b>Acknowledgment</b> .....	107



# Introduction

At a party when you talk about a remarkably good or bad experience with customer friendliness, many will eagerly pick up on it. Customer friendliness, or unfriendliness, is on many people's mind. Internet forums on the topic are full of stories that range from negative to positive, from downright furious to extremely jubilant. As a business owner you cannot avoid customer friendliness. On the contrary: you can score with it.

If you want your company to stand out even more than it already does, you can elevate customer friendliness to a true art. It's like cooking: it can always be done with more flavors, other ingredients, more passion. Your customers notice the difference and talk about their experience with you. Customer friendliness can make them stay or leave.

You may ask yourself: 'Is that feasible? Do I have time and attention for that? Will I get my team on board?' Yes, it is possible, for everyone, from beginners to the experienced, from freelancer to small, medium-sized and large enterprises.

The road to more customer friendliness consists of small steps that you measure against feasibility. The first step is a decision: 'I will make customer friendliness (more) important, starting today'. What other steps you can take, I will show you in this practical guide.

Why do I talk about customer friendliness and not about customer service or customer care? Because I feel friendliness is the personal, human touch one brings when dealing with people. It goes beyond all the other aspects of service and care together.

In my early twenties I worked as a hostess on Spain's Costa Dorada. It was a vacation job and my first introduction to tourism. I had no idea what to expect and what exactly was expected of me. I came with an open mind and met my first customers: hundreds of Dutch vacationers. I quickly learned what they expected: that you are there for them when they need you. In my job this didn't just mean telling my customers about the local sights, activities and restaurants, but also providing assistance in difficult situations. People that had been robbed or ended up in a Spanish hospital, needed practical help. Those who were homesick or had

sudden marital problems, needed a sympathetic ear. I liked the work and often got positive reactions from my customers. Without knowing it, I was treading the path of customer friendliness.

What started as a vacation job in my student days grew into a career in tourism, from hostess to tour manager and later on as cruise manager. I was also active as wedding planner, mystery guest for hotels, mystery shopper for stores and respondent for market research for SMEs. Last but not least, I was a customer, in many corners of the earth. My experiences as a customer were quite diverse, in some countries more positive than in others. I saw inspiring examples of customer friendliness, but often saw how it could be better. In my own country of origin, the Netherlands, unnecessary adornment or excessive courtesy is 'not really done'. Yet there is nothing exaggerated about service with a little extra. It is appreciated by the customer and it pays off, in every country and culture.

The Spanish adventure lies forty years behind me. Over the years, I have served thousands of customers to the best of my ability. The insights and experiences that I've gained since my first encounter with customer friendliness I now use to provide hospitality trainings at home and abroad, including on worldwide missions for PUM Netherlands Senior Experts. Each training session gives me new perspective and ideas. In this book I would like to share my story with you. Be surprised by tips that will help you increase customer satisfaction so that customers will stay with you and never walk out the door because they don't feel welcome. Pick up what applies to you and use it to your advantage. That is my wish for you from the bottom of my heart.

Jeannette Biesbroeck

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For the ease of reading I have chosen to refer to the customer as 'he' whereas, of course, I mean 'he/she'. Also, throughout the book I have used the word 'customer' or sometimes 'client'. However, this can also refer to prospective customer, visitor, consumer, student, passenger, patient, and not in the last place 'guest'. The words 'employee' and 'team member' have the same meaning in the context of someone working for you. Finally, I have chosen to use American English spelling.

