

The Four-Letter Words That Could Sink Your Customer Service

by Nicole Fallon, Business News Daily Assistant Editor | January 15, 2014 04:20pm ET

Are you getting four-letter words from customers? No, not expletives. Rather, these four-letter words are short, nondescript answers like "fine," "good" and "okay" when you ask your customers about their experience with your business.

Jim Knight — a business speaker, consultant and training expert with more than 30 years of service industry experience — believes those types of customers responses are red flags when it comes to evaluating customer service.

"We live in a world of acceptable mediocrity," Knight told BusinessNewsDaily. "In every industry, people are just going through the motions of customer service. They do just enough to get by. It doesn't matter what people are selling — unforgettable, memorable service always trumps product, price, convenience, etc."

To succeed in customer service, Knight said, a business must be "customer-obsessed." Businesses should genuinely want to listen to their customers and provide the best service possible. But it's even more important for businesses to differentiate themselves from the competition, he said.

"Customers crave differentiation," Knight said. "If everyone is vanilla, be the chocolate."

Knight offered three more tips for improving customer service:

- **Go beyond average.** The baseline for service has been raised. Average is no longer good enough — it's forgettable. Ask customers specific questions about their experience, and listen for words like "fine" and "okay" that scream mediocrity, and then ask what you can do to make their next experience better.
- **Keep up with your competition.** Business owners should keep their fingers on the pulse of the industry, to understand what their competitors are doing. They can then use that knowledge to do something more unique. Always network and look for opportunities to figure out how you can be a step ahead.
- **Hire the right people.** Building the right team from the start is vital to great customer service. Look for candidates who are the absolute best people for the job and who also genuinely care about providing great service.