

Insulate yourself from lawsuits by improving Customer Service

I realize that the title of this article will be met with a collective "duh" response. It is sort of like; "Lose weight through sensible eating and exercise". So although the title is simplistic and vague, I would hope that you would continue to read the content. Hopefully, one or more of the steps toward improving your customer service will be new information or at least validate some of the service standards you already practice.

Before I outline some of the steps toward improving customer service, I think we all agree that if a member perceives your club as a business that takes pride in the level of customer service, that member is satisfied that their needs are being met. By exceeding member expectations, you not only increase your member retention, you begin to create an environment of friendship between your members and your staff. A club that has learned to attain this level of customer service is not only financially more successful than their competition the club is also rewarded by achieving a "suit-proof" environment. I have said it before and I'll say it again; friends don't sue friends. Here are a few steps you can take to improve your customer service.

1) Train your staff (that includes you) to greet EVERY member when they walk into your club with cheerful "good morning (member name)". In this age of automated check-in systems, there is no excuse whatsoever that your front counter employee does not know the member's name. It is right there in front of them on the monitor.

2) Five Star Hotel your bath rooms. Nothing says more about the quality of a business than the appearance of the bathrooms. It is the first thing we notice, whether we realize it or not. A GREAT bathroom puts a smile on your face. This is especially true with hotels and restaurants but also with health clubs. A club that demonstrates legendary pride in the cleanliness and beauty of their bathrooms will ultimately improve your member's comfort level and validate their decision to become a member. It amazes me how little effort goes into the design and maintenance of most health club locker rooms.

3) Consider third-party collection of your membership dues. It is hard to be the good guy and the bad guy at the same time. Your job is to sell the membership and maintain customer loyalty by helping your client achieve their fitness goals. If they fall behind on their membership payment, it is difficult for you to now put on the "hat" as a collector. Your image as the good guy just evaporated. Now, even if the member pays, they will not look at you or your club the same again. Also, if you choose wisely, the third party collection company can also help you with your marketing.

It is definitely worth it.

4) Remind your staff that they are to help the member achieve their fitness goals. We sometimes forget why we got into this business in the first place. Get your staff out on the floor and do their jobs. It will not only improve customer service; it will improve your bottom line. Having your staff ask questions like, "Can I get you a shake for the ride home today?"; "Have you checked out our new Pilates classes yet? We have great packages available this month."; "Have you had your

fitness assessment lately? Why don't we schedule a time with our lead trainer?"...the list goes on and on.

5) Hire people who like to smile. I don't care how many certifications your trainer may have or how buff they look. If they do not possess the talent to create a genuine smile, then don't hire them. People like being around people who are happy.

6) Keep your equipment in "like new" condition. Next to squeaky clean bathrooms, your equipment is the next biggest statement of your level of overall "quality".

7) Thank your member every single day for coming into the club to work out. Nothing feels better than when you leave a great service business, whether it be a restaurant or health club, when someone smiles and says, "Thanks for coming in...hope to see you again soon".

8) Realize that you can't be all things to all people. Create your niche and then stick to it. If you don't want kids in the gym, then don't make exceptions. If a member is being rude to your staff then throw them out. If a member consistently miss-uses your equipment or practices poor technique. Either you should help them with proper form and etiquette or get send them packing.

The second you lose control of your club's atmosphere, you create a breeding ground for accidents and potential litigation. Members will thank you for enforcing your rules and guidelines.

In summary, the creation of a great workout experience for your member will also create a safe, clean, friendly, suit-proof environment.