



ACE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE: “WHERE CUSTOMER SERVICE IS OUR LANGUAGE”

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The Ace Center for Excellence has been built up from the solid foundation and long history of customer service we have nurtured and developed in our 90-plus-year history of Ace Hardware. In order to understand the essence of what we do at the Ace Center for Excellence, one must understand what we do in our everyday business.

The retail hardware/home improvement industry is very competitive, and always has been. We compete with the “biggest and baddest” retailers on the planet. Retailers such as Home Depot, Lowes, and Wal-Mart exist in nearly every Ace Hardware market. In addition to these brick-and-mortar retailers, we also compete on a daily basis with the Internet. So why is it that we continue to be successful, year after year after year?

1. In our industry you either have to be the *biggest*, the *cheapest*, the *most unique*, the *most convenient*, or the very best at *customer service* to succeed. A typical Ace Hardware store will never be the biggest or cheapest, but we certainly are convenient, we carry items no one else has, and we are the best at servicing our customers. It’s what we call “predictably consistent service.”

2. As the saying goes, “it all starts at the top.” Ace Hardware has a history of outstanding leadership. Since our beginning, we have had leaders who were clearly focused on creating a culture that lived “helpful” every day. Our leaders understand the importance of differentiating our business in a way that makes sure our customers feel: Welcome. Important, Confident, and Appreciated. This clear focus on customer service is ingrained in Ace Hardware storeowners all around the world. And, as our CEO John Venhuizen says, “We are blessed to be in the business of serving others,” demonstrating a direct correlation from the corporate side of Ace Hardware to the local store owners who are servicing customers in their neighborhood stores. At all levels and departments in the Ace Hardware co-op model, we live and breathe customer service daily.

3. Our individual Ace Hardware storeowners and owners of multi-store Ace Hardware businesses are the ones who execute the vision and value system of Ace Hardware. Since we are a cooperative where the storeowners own the company, the individual stores must “want” to execute amazing customer service. Successful storeowners understand this and are committed to being “the most helpful hardware store on the planet.”

Helpful 101 and 201

The results of the “commitment to excellence,” as it relates to customer service, come in many different ways. We have won the J.D. Power Award for excellence in customer service for eight years *in a row!* Pretty cool! That said, Ace also knows that “what got us to where we are will not be good enough to get us to where we need to be.” After we had won the award for six years in a row, we discarded all of our customer service training and built a new program—a pretty gutsy move! We call this “new and improved” customer service training “Helpful 101” and a follow-up training called “Helpful 201.”

The speakers and trainers we use for the Ace Center for Excellence are either storeowners or executives in the Ace Hardware Corporation who have been involved in the development and execution of creating the culture of helpful. As a client, you can hear from the people who are in the trenches, the ones who spend most days of their week working to execute this customer service training, or you get the viewpoint of the executives of the Ace Hardware Corporation.

Understanding the dynamics of how Ace Hardware Corporation and the Ace Hardware retailers work together is important to understanding the Ace Center for Excellence. We want to be sure our client knows the answer to: How is it that at Ace Hardware, where the storeowners are entrepreneurs and independent business owners, they are able to execute customer service at such a high level of success?

The secret or, better said, secrets, lie in the way we interact with our customers on a daily and individual basis. At the Ace Center for Excellence, we believe we have a message to deliver to our clients that will empower them to be consistently amazing at customer service. We believe the tactics we use in our business can relate to any business anywhere in the world where servicing a customer is important to our client's success. We also believe we can teach these tactics by bringing them to life in real-world stories in a way where our clients can tweak the tactic and use them within their own business.

In addition to teaching the backbone of our customer service training, "Helpful 101" and "Helpful 201," the Ace Center for Excellence will educate, inspire, and mobilize our clients on many of the 52 tactics that Shep Hyken talks about in his book, "Amaze Every Customer Every Time." Shep is a world-known speaker and expert on customer service. After studying different businesses that excel at customer service, Shep came to Ace with the idea of using Ace Hardware as the content expert for his book. After interviewing many different Ace retailers, Shep noted 52 distinct tactics Ace Hardware retailers use when interacting with customers, leading him to understand why and how Ace Hardware has been recognized year after year as the best at servicing customers in the hardware/home improvement industry.

The Ace Guarantee

Finally, we believe our clients will come away from a keynote presentation and/or classroom- facilitated workshop with an action plan that when used in their business will:

Inspire a new energized focus on customer service

Take away new ideas/tactics to use in their business unit/department

Have a common language to use when talking about customer service

Improve business results related to excellent customer service

Feel empowered to satisfy Every Customer Every Time

...We Guarantee It!

Art Freedman has been an Ace hardware storeowner for more than 25 years and a retailer for 46 years. He is an expert in customer service training for Ace Hardware Corporation.

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