

Simple but not easy: The Importance of Outstanding Customer Service

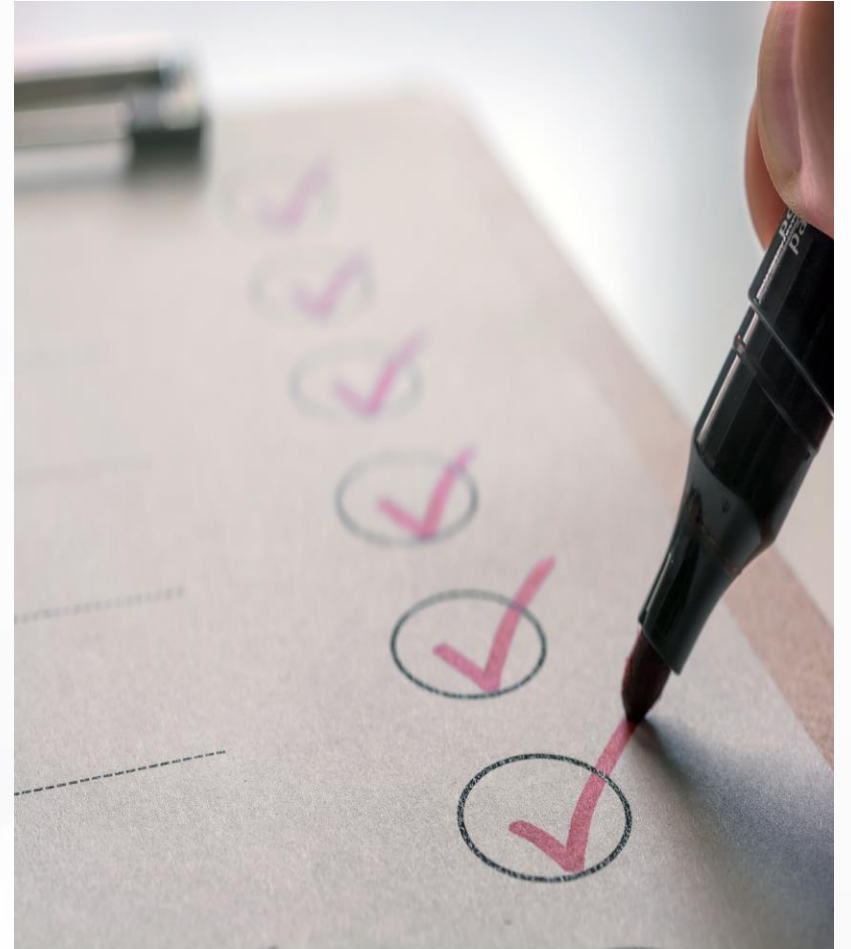
The Agenda

What is outstanding customer service?

Do we measure up?

What are the challenges?

How do we get there?



Let's define **OUTSTANDING** customer service

1. Reflect on a time **YOU** received exceptional service
2. Discuss what took place during the experience that left you feeling so positive
3. Use this to craft a vision of outstanding customer service



Benefits associated with exceptional service

- Increases confidence & satisfaction
- Customer feels appreciated, valued and heard
- Projects a professional image
- Helps to identify opportunities to conserve resources and save money
- Decrease in escalation of complaints to a higher level
- **HAPPY CUSTOMERS =
HAPPY VOTERS!!**



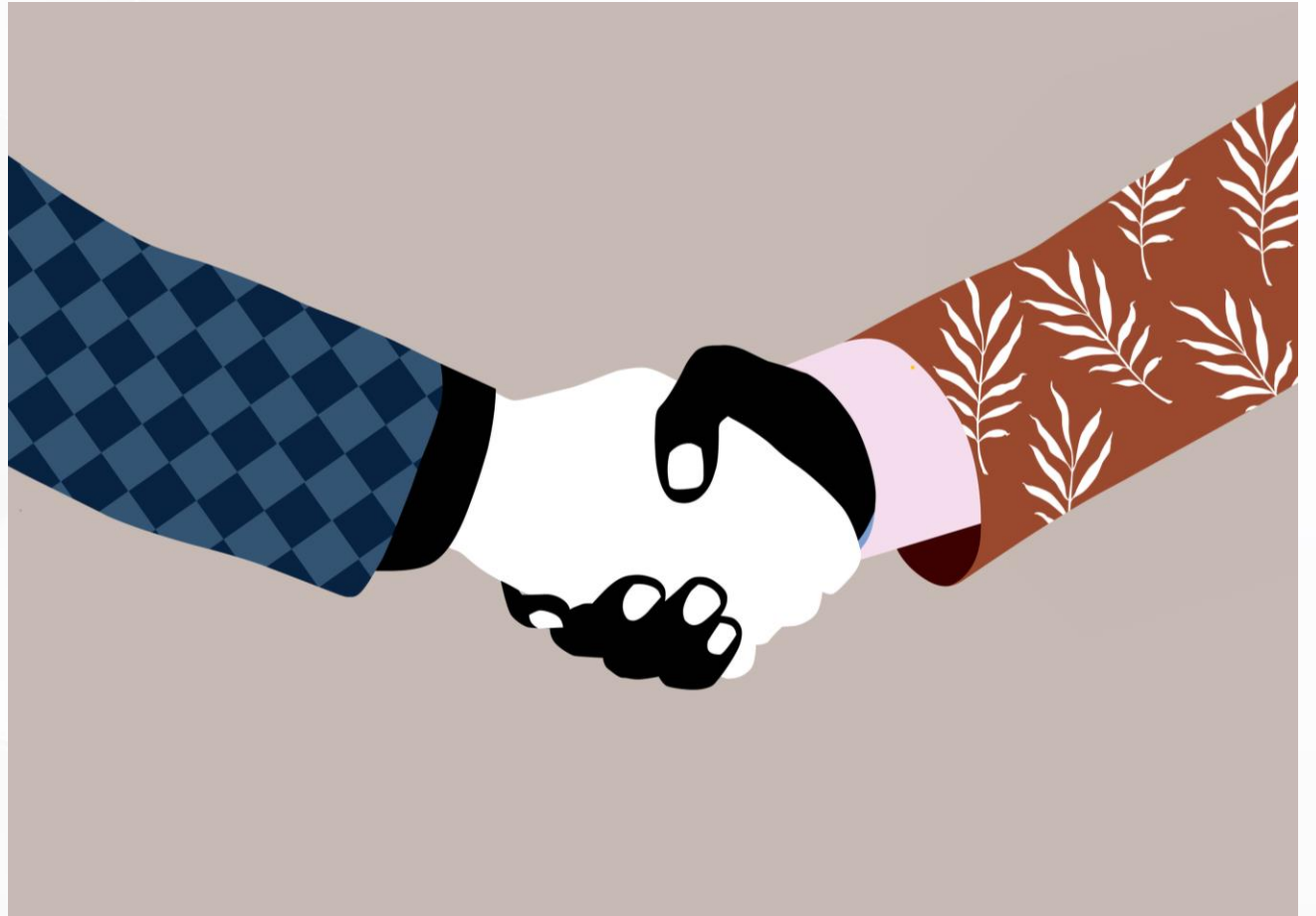
Best Practices

- Check your bad day at the door
- Smile and make eye contact
- Place yourself in their shoes
- Speak to the customer at their level



Best Practices

- If you make a mistake, apologize sincerely
- Say...
 - ◇ Please
 - ◇ Thank you
 - ◇ You're welcome (not "no problem")



Best Practices

- Be flexible
- No interrupting
- Listen to their tone of voice
- Watch body language
- Be aware of your tone of voice



Forbes research says.....

96% of customers say customer service is important in their choice of loyalty to a brand.

American consumers will pay 17% more to purchase from a company with a reputation for great service

Rates

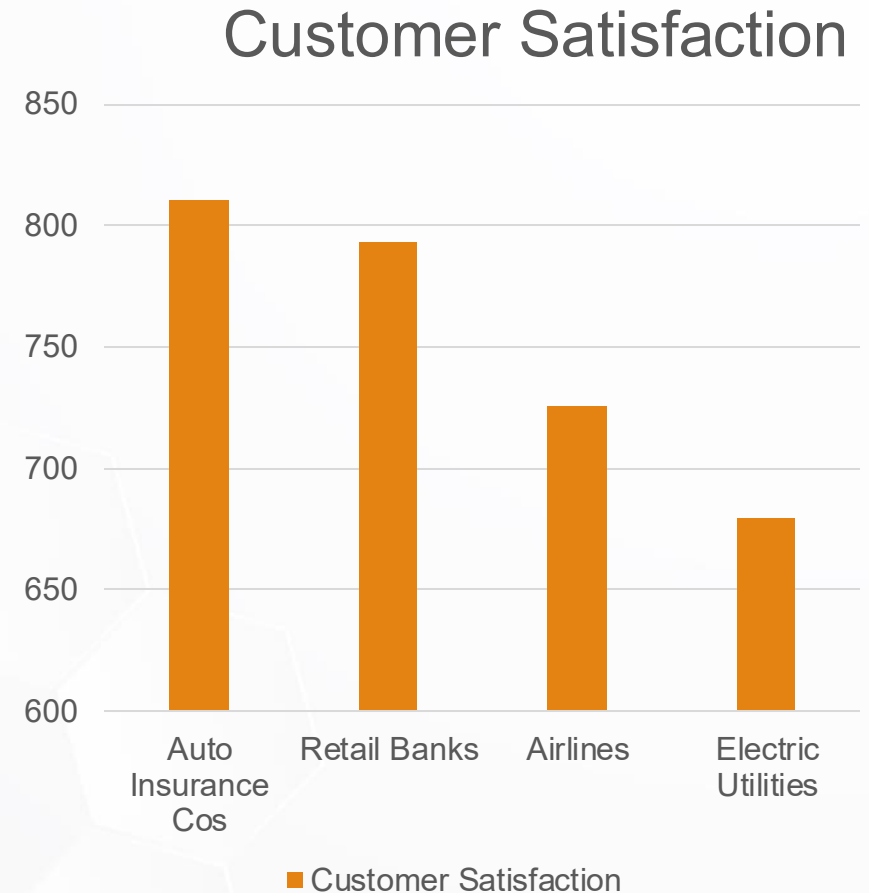
Reliability

Relationships

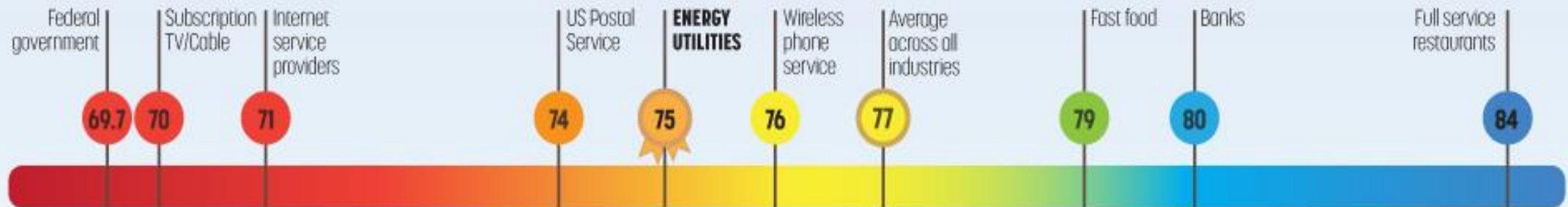
Do we measure up?

According to a J.D. Power 2016 Electric Utility Residential Customer Satisfaction Study, electric utilities struggle to match other industries in customer satisfaction.

In the J.D. Power study, satisfaction is calculated on a 1,000-point scale.



APPA/ ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index)

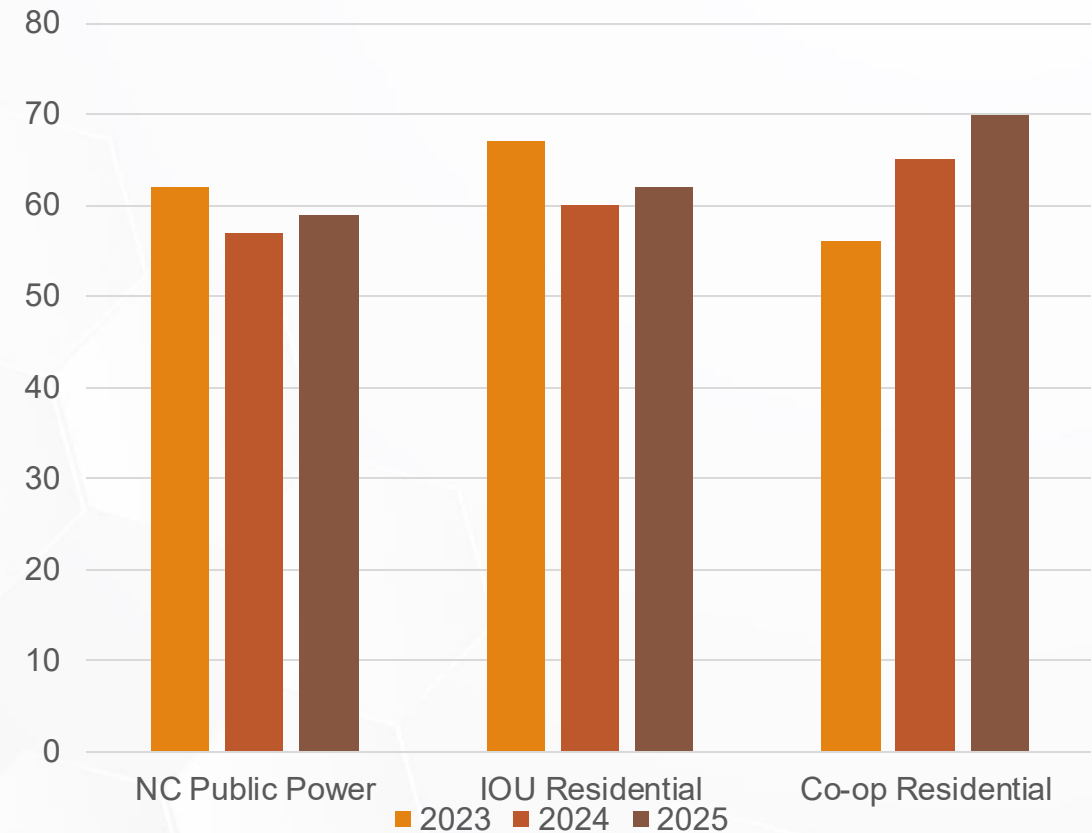


ElectriCities Retail Customer Survey Data

Overall Satisfaction



Helpful/ Knowledgeable Staff



What are the Challenges?



Customer Types

Customer behaviors are categorized in types....

- Transactor
- Social
- Mad/ verbal
- Mad/ action
- Hardship



The C.A.R.P. System

The CARP System was devised by **Robert Bacal** and is presented in his book, *Diffusing Hostile Customers Workbook*, 3rd Edition (2010). Following is a breakdown of the acronym CARP, which stands for:

- Control
- **Acknowledge**
- Refocus
- Problem Solve



Salesforce research....

61% of customers would prefer to use self-service to resolve simple issues

Forbes research....

77% of consumers say inefficient customer experiences detract from their quality of life

For those “self-service” customers, is this what they see in your program list?



Bright and shiny but no clear entry point??

The Social Media Dilemma

We use it to promote, celebrate, inform, etc, etc, etc.....

Customers might use it to tear down, insult, etc, etc, etc.....

Forbes research....Customers tell an average of nine people about a positive experience with a brand, but they [tell 16 people about](#) a negative experience



The Social Media Dilemma

What, if anything, does this mean for public power employees? As a city/town Customer Service Representative, you are constantly in the public eye and your behavior on-line should recognize your prominent role in the eyes of your customers. If your on-line behavior is bad, it reflects poorly not only on you, but also on the city/town you work for (fair or not).

Social media is now so woven into the fabric of people's lives that they forget not everything is suitable to put out there. People are looking!



The Good News according to Western Energy Institute...

The solution is not very expensive. The most effective strategies to improving customer experience and reducing customer effort are built on the following key principles:

- 1. Front-line employees control the customer experience.**
- 2. Understand the customer's wants and needs.**
- 3. Simplify any and all processes.**

The Good News according to Western Energy Institute...

1. Front-line employees control the customer experience.

The ideal goal is for front-line employees to provide customer service and solve problems quickly and easily (without lavish spending), or with what customers perceive as “low effort” on their part.

How do we get there? Leaders

Forbes - Customer experience leaders are more likely to have senior executives leading company-wide efforts.

Who is your champion?

What are they “championing”?

....could we start with learning....



The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win.” ~ Vince Lombardi

- Everyone wants to win or be successful
- In contrast, those who have the will to put in the hard work consistently, are exceptional
- Great performers in any walk of life, including customer service, have the will to prepare to be successful
- Further, they maintain that ethic in order to perform at a high level in a dynamic, ever-changing environment.



Train your staff

Invest in learning

Forbes - Companies with initiatives to improve their customer experience see employee engagement increase by 20% on average.

What are you doing?



Know your product

Key messages of the public power advantage.

- **1.6 Million Strong:** Public power is a formidable presence in North Carolina. More than 1.6 million people in North Carolina – or 1 out of every 8 people in the state – get their power from a public power community.
- **Affordable Rates:** Public power customers in North Carolina enjoy affordable, competitive and stable electric rates.



Know your product

- **Exceptional Reliability:** Reliability is a trademark of public power. We experience fewer power outages than larger utilities – and get the lights back on more quickly when the power does go out.
- **Local Employees, Local Control:** The people who repair your power lines, answer your phone calls, and set your electric rates are your neighbors.
- **Economic Development, Community Growth:** Improving the quality of life in public power communities across North Carolina.



The Good News according to Western Energy Institute...

2. Understand the customer's wants and needs.

Most customer connect processes are designed to address the need of the utility. **We're solving the wrong problem!** Customer satisfaction rises when the customer's needs are met.

Western Energy

A BIG difference between utilities and other businesses is the degree to which answering a customer's question requires engaging with additional points of contact.

And....Public Power staff provides service for a lot more than just the electric utility.

Critical application – Large account management

Large commercial and industrial accounts often generate most of a city's electric revenue.

- Audit **large industrial** account meter multipliers quarterly and **other accounts** with meter multipliers on a scheduled, periodic basis.
- Proactively connect with these customers.
- Often, a utility assigns this task to someone with Key Account responsibilities.



Critical application– Unexpected outages

What is the impact?

- From a customer service perspective, power outages stress customers because of the uncertainty they cause.
- An OMS will help CSRs relieve customer stress because they will reduce restoration times and..
- Enhance customer communications, which serve to minimize the uncertainty about power outages.
- No OMS, improve communication between field and office staff.
- Notification for planned outages and updates on restoration times (College Station TX). Text communication.



Why do you hire customer service representatives?

Really, why?

Noted business strategist, Steven Covey, wrote, “begin with the end in mind.”

So, as we think about our customer service representatives, how might we describe their purpose?

What is their “end”?



Insert critical thinking

Salesforce - 78% of reps and 72% of mobile workers say customers seem more rushed than they used to

That means stress for your reps



Insert critical thinking

As a customer service representative (CSR), you are always “On”

This becomes especially troublesome during busy times, when the pace is hectic.



Critical thinking

You may be tempted to be impatient.

You may feel you cannot afford the time and energy to take a measured approach representative of critical thinking.

Because:

You assume you know the answers already

You will not believe what the customer will tell you.



Critical thinking

Socrates' method of questioning, "Socratic Questioning," includes the following steps:

1. Seeking evidence
2. Closely examining reasoning and assumptions
3. Analyzing basic concepts, and
4. Tracing out implications not only of what is said but of what is done



Western Energy

Studies have indicated that CSRs who advocate for customers can reduce customer effort by 77 percent.

Combining advocacy with effective planning and scheduling can only improve customer satisfaction.

Fun fact! - Most of our customers move 8-10 times in a lifetime (with different utility companies) and we expect them to know “the process”. That’s why we rank below the fast food places!!

Hire Invest in your thinkers!!



Look for these qualities: HUMILITY

- To have humility is to be aware of one's knowledge, including what one does not know.
- It implies a lack of arrogance, boastfulness and conceit.
- The character of humility allows us to challenge our own biases.
- In a customer service role, to have humility means to admit to a customer if you made a mistake.
- It can also mean not prejudging customers, to treat them with dignity and to keep an open mind



COURAGE

- In a customer service role, courage can show up in diverse ways.
- For example, there may be times when you need to speak up on behalf of a customer if, in fact, a mistake has been made by the city.
- This is a difficult decision since it may expose a fellow employee.
- On the other hand, when confronted by an angry customer, it will take courage to tell a customer directly what the city policy is on cut offs instead of passing them off to a supervisor.



PATIENCE

- Given the stress of the job, this characteristic is an important quality for customer service representatives.
- Some customers with high bill or cut off issues are in that situation chronically.
- This can be especially frustrating as you know that a significant amount of your time may be required to sort through the complexities of these situations.
- As such, it may seem easier to rush to judgement or to give up on a customer without exhausting resources that might help.
- One has intellectual patience when one does not give up in the face of complexity or frustration.



The Good News according to Western Energy Institute...

3. Simplify any and all processes.

To the extent that process complexity is inevitable, the key is to not burden the customer.

Map your processes

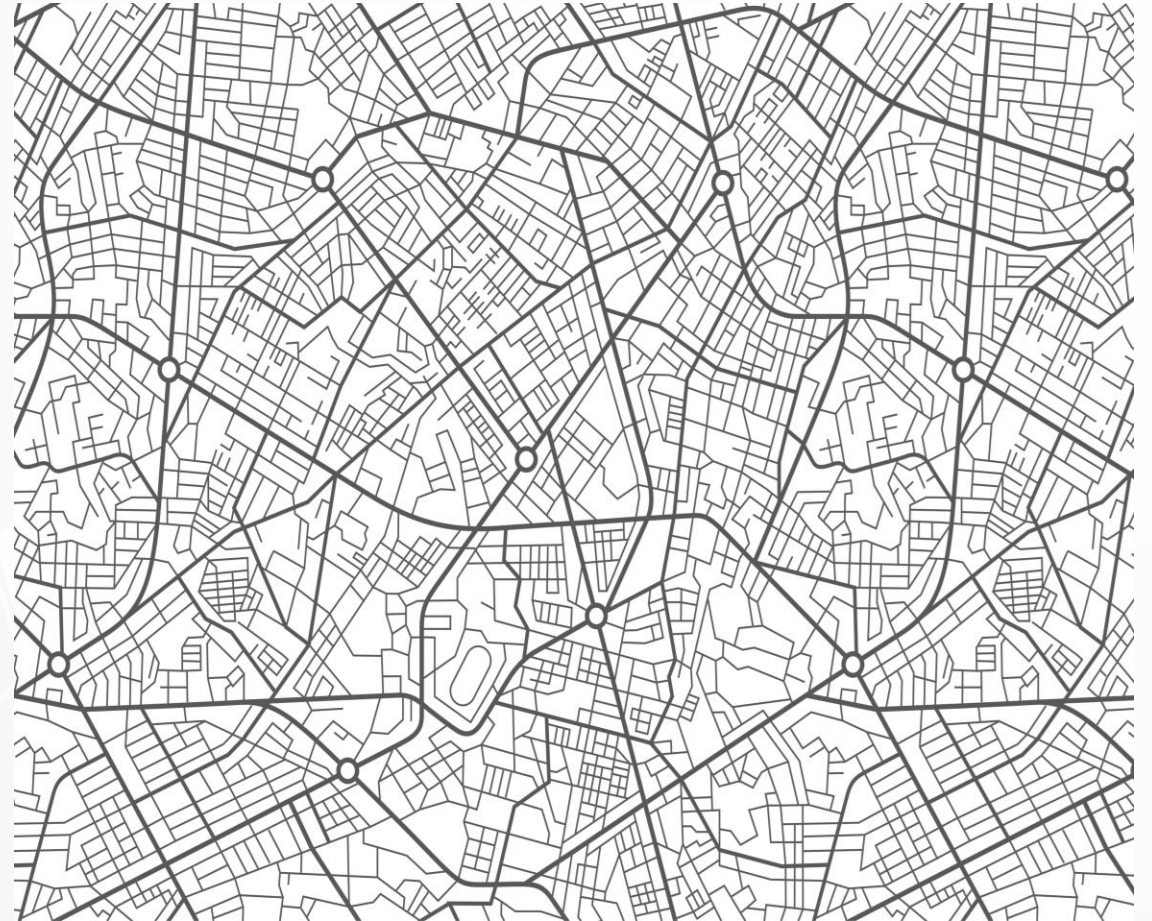
Ask your staff....

Really good people (staff) won't get excited about promoting a bad product and.....

They won't promote a good product with bad processes

Red flags:

- Customer needs to visit another office to continue the process
- Customer needs to bring a lot of information or risk delay (see DMV)
- Customer is responsible for follow-up



Know your customers

Many processes include “self-service” options

That’s great because retail survey data tells us customers prefer doing business through our websites!

But....what if the web process is a mess?

Customer Preference



Example...

- A customer is curious about the last year of electric consumption
- They visit your website but get lost in the menus
- They look at the current bill and notice information about a portal
- They attempt to create a login
- They are ultimately successful
- Once in the portal, they learn that only 3 months of history is available
- They didn't want to call the office.....but.....they do and now they are not happy

Forbes research...the customer experience

What mountains are your customers climbing?

Companies that use tools like customer journey maps reduce their cost of service by 15-20%.

Spend time following your procedural journey. You might be surprised what you encounter!



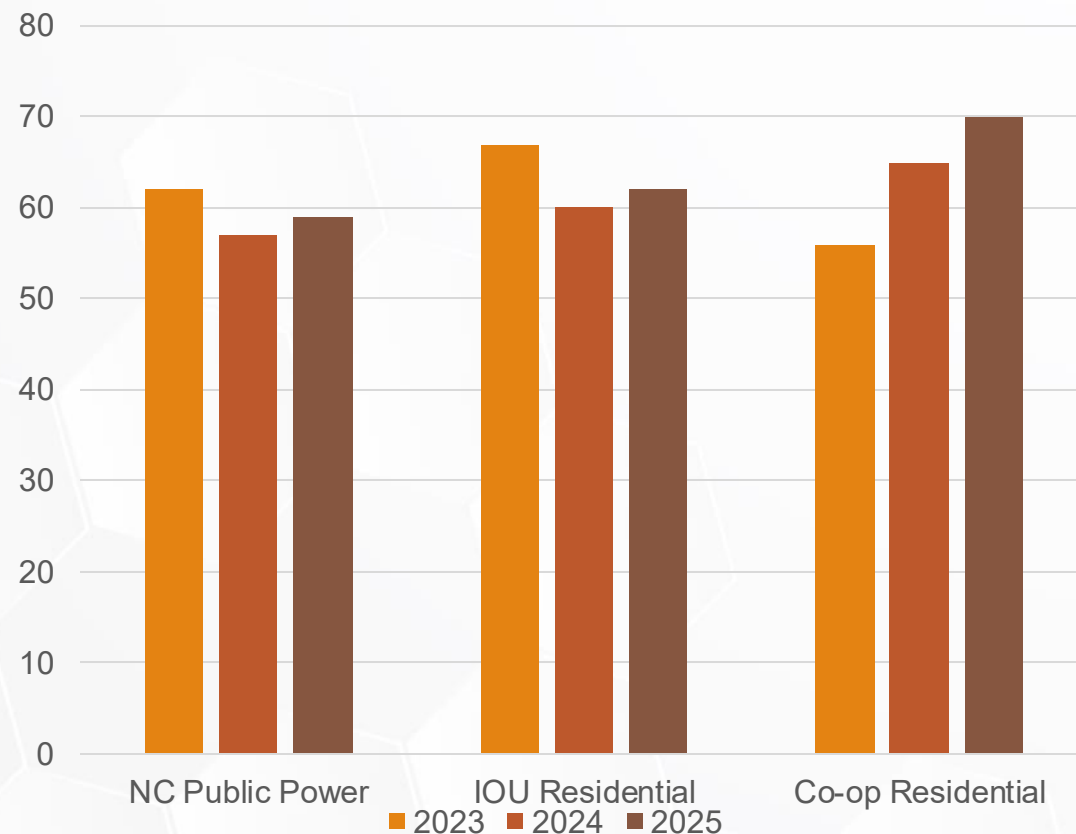
“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.” C.S. Lewis

So, are you ready to reach for outstanding customer service?

It won’t happen overnight.
Be prepared for resistance.

But also, prepare to be amazed.

Helpful/ Knowledgeable Staff



To summarize.....

What is outstanding customer service?

You already know!

Do we measure up?

Well, if you're satisfied, then maybe

What are the challenges?

Customers, staff, bulky processes, multiple services, social media

How do we get there?

Identify your champion – establish the corporate culture

Once you find the right people, invest in them

Analyze your processes



