

Customer Service Gurus: Catching Up With John Tschohl

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John Tschohl is a US Customer Service Guru, consultant, speaker and author who has been working to improve customer service since 1969. With such a long track record, he's seen the rise and fall of plenty of customer service fads, and has spent decades working to perfect his customer-service knowledge. With seven books and over twenty training programs under his belt, he's a tired-and-true Customer Service Guru, and we're delighted to have him back on the site.

We first interviewed him [last year](#), so it was well past time for a catch-up when the email came through to arrange another chat.

What compelled you to write your Customer Service Training Program in 1980?

"I saw companies in 1969 spending a lot of money on advertising, but when the customer walked in the door the employees basically hit them with baseball bats and drove them away. I thought that if you treated the customer like a king or queen, business would soar, so I asked "why is customer service so bad?" This is 1969, so before most readers of this article were born.

I figured out that most firms had never trained their people on customer service, and back then companies had huge employee turnover with multiple locations. I decided to create a program that would change attitudes and behaviors and teach the skills needed for great customer service. "Feelings" was released in January, 1980. It was called "Feelings" because, whether they realise it or not, people make an emotional decision about service. It had a user-friendly "leader guide" and 3 audio cassette tapes and a 6 x 9" perfect bound book.

Back then **no-one** wanted to train employees. They only worked with management and leaders. Seems like they felt it was beneath them to work with or train front-line employees."



What do you see as the main problems facing customer service departments today?

"I never focus on a customer service *department*. A better question would be "What do you see as the main problems organizations have with customer service?"

I ask it that way because I focus on the total workforce in companies.

The way I see it, the main problems are:

1. Management does not value superior customer service
2. Management does not value all employees
3. Very few CEO's understand the power of the service strategy. Very few understand how to own and dominate the market. How to have rapid growth. All through an incredible customer experience.
4. Most firms believe they deliver awesome service. Much worse in the US where about 95% of CEO's believe they have great service and 95% of the customers have trouble identifying even 5 service leaders.
5. Few organizations are willing to train their staff on customer service more than one program every 5-10 years. It is difficult to change behaviors with one magic program every 5 or 10 years."

How do you feel about the reliance on automated systems and robotic menus used by customer service departments?

"This is a huge problem. Most firms do *not* want to talk to customers. They want to make it very difficult to communicate with them. They think IVR/Voice Mail is cool and provides really great service. They do everything possible to have banker hours, incompetent and rule driven employees, plus menus that walk you through "Push 2 for English, push 3 for Spanish and push 7 to go to hell." It's just stupid.

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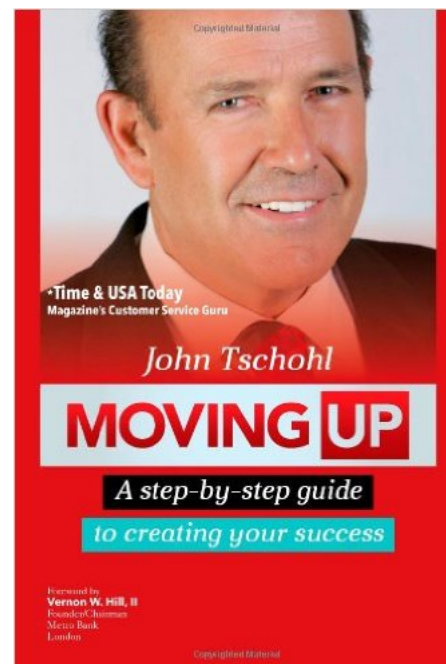
I'll give you the other side too, and give you an example of really bad technology, very bad customer service and stupid techniques. Call the Star Tribune in Minneapolis. 1-612-673-4000. This is the Twin Cities' major newspaper. I am up by 5:30 am and like to read the newspaper before going to work. I know young people will just read it on their smart phone or the Internet, but my newspaper is supposed to be at my home by 6 am – and put at the side door. In the last 5 months I have called to complain maybe 40 times. Nothing happens. They ask questions that, when you respond on the voice technology, never work. What is worse, when you get through they have a list of questions they **MUST** ask, every single time. They first need my phone number. That at least makes sense because this brings up my name and address. They then want to confirm my address, and email me almost everything on their data base. I tell them I have **NOT** moved since yesterday. I just found out if the employees do not ask the questions every time, they get written up and docked. This is really stupid."

Tell us about your most recent books and your reasons for writing them.

"My most recent book was [Moving Up](#). I believe one of the huge problems most firms have is the employees have self-imposed limitations – they do not dream or see themselves as they can be. Probably 2/3 of employees have personal problems, and many do just enough to not get fired. The book is designed to get people to want to become indispensable and extraordinary. Simply put, if they do, they move up and make more money. Every CEO would love to see this happen.

Another book that I update every 2 years is *Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service*. This book focuses on the strategy of customer service, and if you're in business, it's a must read. It also tells the story of Vernon Hill from Commerce Bank and Metro Bank – the organisation with the highest customer service ratings and NPS scores in Britain. They're the most customer driven bank in the world, so if you want to follow what happens if you focus on a solid service strategy, this is the best role model in the world."

What aspects of customer service did you feel you



What aspects of customer service did you feel you had to tackle for these projects?

"My message is very simple. Anyone can write books or customer service programs that are boring, dull and complicated, but that's not the point of good service. Steve Jobs believed in Simplicity, and everything I touch has the same aspect. Many human resource people want real complicated materials, but I think customer service is quite simple. Take exceptional care of your customers. Make it easy for a customer to do business with you. Have empowered employees. Master Speed."