



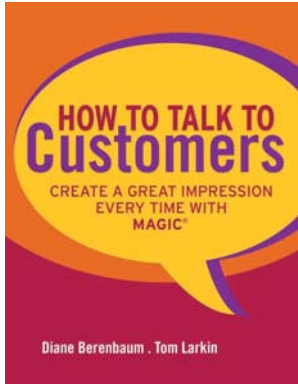
# HOW TO TALK TO **Customers**

CREATE A GREAT IMPRESSION  
EVERY TIME WITH  
**MAGIC®**

**Diane Berenbaum . Tom Larkin**

## Advance Praise for *How to Talk to Customers*

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*“How to Talk to Customers* presents a system for interacting with customers based on empathy, dignity, and doing the right thing. Use these ideas to turn your customers into raving fans.”

--**Ken Blanchard**, coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*<sup>®</sup> and *Customer Mania*

"Talking to customers seems so easy; however, to make a great impression on them, you need the MAGIC System."

--**Norma Diaz**, CEO, Community Health Group

“Warning: This book will radically change corporate cultures and provide businesses with a competitive advantage in customer service. MAGIC smashes superficial, ineffective approaches to solve complex customer service issues through a simple and fun approach. This framework can resolve even the thorniest predicament.”

--**Barry L. Ogle**, Vice President Leadership Enrichment Institute, Wyndham Vacation Ownership

“You have to take care of your co-workers and customers. This book takes common sense approaches and guides you on how to build successful business relationships.”

--**Paul Orfalea**, Kinko’s founder and coauthor of *Copy This!*

*“How to Talk to Customers illustrates the keys to making MAGIC every day with every contact. If service is a differentiator for your organization, this book should be on everyone’s desk, from the day they start!”*

--**William M. Lyons**, President and CEO, American Century Companies, Inc.

“The book that leaders at all levels have been waiting for. It provides a clear and practical tool for assessing customer interaction skills and will help any organization wow their customers with extraordinary service.”

--**Asheesh Advani**, CEO, CircleLending

“Whether you are moving up the ladder or already running your organization, the advice in this book is truly MAGIC and will help you leave a lasting legacy with everyone you meet. Be remembered for the right reasons and make a positive impact with every encounter starting now; it will change your life!”

--**Paige Arnof-Fenn**, founder and CEO, Mavens & Moguls

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“I hope you believe in MAGIC, because this system can really help you build the generous, intimate, personal relationships with customers that will power the growth of your business!”

**--Keith Ferrazzi, author, *Never Eat Alone* and CEO of professional development and consulting firm Ferrazzi Greenlight**

“If you deal with people, this book is a must-have! The relationships with your 'customers' (clients, co-workers, family and friends) will flourish as you put MAGIC to work.”

**--Jason Checketts, Manager of Learning and Development, Wells Fargo**

“There's no greater way to help your team build a culture of customer service than by using the MAGIC system. You'll see results immediately...and those results will truly amaze you (and your customers!).”

**--Brian Cole Miller, author, *Quick Team-building Activities for Busy Managers***

“MAGIC is one of those simple-but-far-from-easy ideas that can revolutionize a company because it transforms how people think and act. At FreshDirect, we believe in MAGIC and strive to practice it daily.”

**--Dean Furbush, CEO, FreshDirect**

“Any call center senior executive, manager, supervisor - or anyone who talks to your customers - should read this book then commit to applying its simple principles. Tom and Diane bring to light the fact that all consumers are seeking a unique experience from companies today, and this is it.”

**--C. Paul Turner, Managing Director, Training and Performance Improvement, Citifinancial Mortgage, Inc. and Citicorp Trust Bank, fsb**

“Any organization interested in creating passionate and loyal customers should read this book. The MAGIC system shows you how to impress even the most discerning customers.”

**--Rudy Escalante, CEO, ICOSA Software North America, Inc.**

“I Love *How to Talk to Customers!* I want this to be required reading for our employees going forward.”

**--Monica Kelly, Quality Analyst, Account Services, Colonial Supplemental Insurance**

“One of the most useful manuals for companies and individuals who are serious about exceeding customers' expectations. Follow the 5 MAGIC Steps, understand why words are perceived as tragic and how they can become MAGIC, and MAGIC will become part of your company -- and personal culture.”

**--Jansje Stramwasser, Senior Training Manager, Convergys Employee Care**

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“The journey required to develop a long-term relationship begins with that first, critical face-to-face conversation. Berenbaum and Larkin have created a masterful roadmap for how to build immediate rapport and lay the foundations for enduring trust.”

**--Andrew Sobel, author, *Clients for Life and Making Rain***

“What distinguishes you from your competition is often the customer's perception of his or her service experience. Read this book to discover practical ideas that you can use to delight your customer, every time.”

**--Deb Ketcham, Manager of Process Improvement, ACCO Brands Corporation**

“Trust-based supplier/customer relationships are the wave of the business future. *How to Talk to Customers* is the handbook of how to create and navigate those critical relationships.”

**--Charles H. Green, Founder and President, Trusted Advisor Associates**

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## Preface

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It seems so simple, and yet, it is rare. In fact, I'm still surprised when it happens.

When you answer the phone, it's nice if you sound like you are having a great day. Sound like you are happy to hear from me. When I walk into your store, look me in the eye and offer a genuine smile. Greet me as you would like to be greeted.

It seems so simple. So why are examples like these the exception rather than the norm?

The late Buckminster Fuller, American visionary, designer, architect, and inventor of the geodesic dome, was one of these great exceptions. Ten minutes shy of giving a speech to thousands of people in a huge auditorium, he had disappeared. Finally, someone found him in the public restroom. He was picking up trash off the floor and wiping the counters around the sinks. They said to him, "Mr. Fuller, what are you doing? Aren't you speaking in ten minutes?"

He replied, "Oh, I'm just cleaning my bathroom."

So whose world is it? Whose responsibility is it to make it a place where we like to be? Bucky felt it was his. And we feel it is ours.

Can actions like Bucky's become the norm? We think so. This book was written because we are passionate about *interpersonal sustainability*. We believe in treating each other in such a way that your actions make a positive contribution to another's day. Every interpersonal contact should contribute to the desire to be in a continued relationship with the other party.

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We'd love to think about what *that* could do for business, and for mankind.

It seems so simple.

We actually believe it is. This book is filled with common sense, instantly applicable ideas and tools that you can use to Make A Great Impression on the Customer (or anyone). To be MAGIC.

Having over twenty-five years of interpersonal training and consulting experience, we decided it was time to reach a broader audience and share our findings with the world. We are grateful that our publisher, Jossey-Bass, feels the same way. Our hope is that you will find the ideas useful and the stories inspiring.

Results matter, and so does the process used to get those results. In this book, we outline a logical process that gets tangible results. Making every contact MAGIC can be simple, and we guarantee you will stand out in the crowd if you apply these concepts in your daily business and personal interactions.

As you heighten your awareness of what the gold standard of customer service looks and feels like, you will see how many little moments you have every day to make a difference. You will also become increasingly aware of how many hundreds of missed opportunities there are every day where you could have been treated better.

Our goal is to bring about a sea change so that the new norm is simply MAGIC. You will know when this is happening when you interact with like-minded people who are as excited about making your day better as you are about theirs.

Have fun cleaning our restrooms. We'll see you there.

It really is that simple.

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## Chapter One—What Does MAGIC Really Mean?

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Up to this point, we've used the term MAGIC to describe a truly positive and memorable customer experience on a number of occasions. And, to a certain extent, we've hinted at what that term implies. Now let's move on to the details.

MAGIC is an acronym for **M**ake **A** Great **I**mpression on the **C**ustomer. This is a straightforward concept; everyone in business wants to interact positively with customers and clients. We want them to feel good about what we do and how we do it. We want that feeling to be so persuasively positive, so MAGIC, that the thought of doing business with us again isn't even a debatable point—of course they're going to come back!

The same is true with our personal lives. If you enjoy someone's company, you're naturally going to want to extend that relationship into the future.

But MAGIC's about more than just positive interactions. It's also about managing perception. It's been said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and nowhere is that more applicable than in our communications with others. The quality of our communications—be it with customers, friends, or family members—is really measured by how others perceive us.

We must make a choice—the choice to manage that perception, create a “quality” interaction, and make a great impression on the other person. Once that choice is made, positive behavior follows.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOICE AND INTEGRITY

The importance of choice is the first central concept of MAGIC—one that you will see repeated as you proceed through the material. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the power of choice is to start off with a short anecdote:

*“It was four days before Christmas and I had a minor emergency. I backed my car into a rock and needed the car fixed right away. My insurance company was of little help and they were anything but empathetic. I found a local mechanic, Bill, with whom I had no previous experience.*

*“Not only did he repair my car, erasing all the remnants of the rock, but he personally delivered it to my front door on Christmas Eve. Here's the clincher: I hadn't even asked him to do so. As if he thought nothing of it, he simply said, ‘I didn't want you to be without your car for the holiday; and I know you have guests, so I brought your car to you.’*

*“Bill's demonstration of exceptional service and regard for me as a person is the essence of respect and accountability that warms my heart. I can say, without reservation, that the next time my car breaks down I will not do business with anyone but Bill.”*

In this story, Bill did everything he was supposed to do. He fixed the customer's car, and he did an excellent job of it. It is very likely that the customer would use Bill's services again if he had done nothing more. However, because Bill made the choice to go

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the extra mile – outside of his job description – and relate personally to the customer, there is no doubt that when this customer's car breaks down again, he will bring it straight to Bill. This is a perfect example of choosing to be MAGIC.

The principle of choice applies to more than just choosing to go above and beyond what is expected. Choice is at the heart of effective communication, particularly in challenging or awkward circumstances. Often, people at work must take control of a negative situation and choose to turn it around. Instead of accepting style differences or misunderstandings as insurmountable, you can make a choice to improve the situation. We choose how to respond: to get angry, or to listen and empathize before we respond.

For example, let's say that a customer is upset about something. He doesn't like your response, so he becomes angry and lashes out at you. Here's where choice comes into play. You can fuel the fire of his anger by responding in kind. Or, making a different choice, you can look past his seemingly irrational behavior and focus on helping him. In order to improve the situation, you choose to really listen to him and empathize with what's behind his emotion.

Many of us are ineffective communicators because we choose to believe that there's simply no viable alternative. In some situations, we may have only been exposed to one choice or solution to a problem – but that doesn't mean that we must refrain from thinking outside of the box! Other times, we may be tempted to blame a customer for somehow arriving at their unfortunate situation in the first place.

Another principle of the MAGIC mindset is the importance of integrity—the commitment to relate to people in a way that is respectful and accountable. We never

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distort or sugarcoat the truth when talking to customers, but keep our focus on the goal at hand: to bring the customer closer to a solution.

People who take an “us versus them” approach to working with customers are inevitably more prone to quote policies, procedures, and the “company line” when it proves expedient. You’ve undoubtedly heard the signs of the “us versus them” approach before:

- “That’s not the way we do things here!”
- “You should have followed the directions!”
- “Why did you do *that*?!?”

After all, if you see yourself on one side of the fence and the customer on the other, it’s awfully tempting to say most anything to get them off the phone. You feel no sense of obligation to do otherwise.

MAGIC, on the other hand, frames communication in the context of community, with a strong sense of relationship and connection between you and the customer. Customers want to feel that you care about them.

## GOING BEYOND YOUR HABITS AND HOT BUTTONS

To move beyond "us versus them" thinking, it is important to remain open and receptive in every interaction, no matter how frustrating. Setbacks are completely understandable, and some are unavoidable. However, in order to avoid unnecessary upset, you must get in touch with your "hot buttons" – those customer responses that drive you crazy and trigger an emotional response. Some people react strongly when they hear confrontational or emotion-driven accusations such as:

- "Don't you people know what you're doing?" or
- "You made a mistake on my statement again!"

Let's be honest. Many of us naturally respond to phrases such as these with defensive words and tone. Have you ever heard yourself say:

- "If you had filled the form out right in the first place, you wouldn't have this problem." or
- "We didn't make a mistake – you did!"

Does any of that sound familiar? Well, we've all been there. We will help you identify your hot buttons and guide you to choose a more effective response. With commitment and practice, you'll find yourself choosing better responses naturally.

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## PRACTICAL TO THE UTMOST

A third concept of MAGIC is its practical value. “Feeling good” isn’t the only result of good communication; businesses benefit when customers can express their needs to you and you can meet their needs. Any interaction, no matter how small, can be transformed from something ordinary to a memorable exchange that creates satisfaction and loyalty.

Let’s say you’re on the phone with a customer who is quite frustrated about receiving an inaccurate order. You acknowledge his experience of the situation – his frustrations. Then, working in concert, you address the problem quickly and efficiently. Your customer is relieved that you understood, you “got” his frustration, and pleased the right order is now in the pipeline. And you’re happy that the customer is genuinely satisfied.

Is that the end of the story? Not likely. By establishing a MAGIC relationship with a customer, you’ve cemented a connection that will influence that customer’s choices in the future, just as Bill the mechanic did in the story at the beginning of this chapter. What customer wouldn’t want to deal with a person or company whose every action reflects a commitment to service and integrity?

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## A TRAGIC MOMENT

Let's take a first-hand view of how your choices can impact the customer experience and decision to do business with you again in the future.

*“I went to a fancy frozen yogurt store in an upscale Boston mall which I used to pass through every day on my way to and from work. My mouth was watering for a certain chocolate flavor in the case. But the young lady behind the counter said, ‘No, you can't have that. What else do you want?’ She gave no explanation as to why she wouldn't give me the flavor I wanted. However, after some probing from me, she admitted it was too hard for her to scoop out. I then suggested she try running the scoop under hot water in the back of the store and then try again. She did that with a look on her face, and in the most perfunctory manner, made one quick attempt to scoop the chocolate and gave up. She said, ‘No, can't do it. What else do you want?’ As a final attempt (because I really wanted that chocolate), I suggested she put the container on the counter to soften up a bit. She refused and asked for the third time, ‘What else do you want?’ It didn't matter to her that I was a frequent customer.*

*“I walked out with nothing, but decided to return the next day to see if anyone else would help me. Fortunately for me, a young man was on duty. I told him what had happened the day before. He said ‘Ma’am, I'm not leaving until I get you that ice cream!’ and immediately got it for me. However, he offered no apology and did not compensate me with extra yogurt or offer it free. Nevertheless, I would go back again simply because*

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*he said he would talk to the young lady who had annoyed me so much. Who knows if he ever did, but the thought that he might set her straight comforted me as a customer.”*

## **MAGIC MAXIMS**

- MAGIC emphasizes relationships—not an “us versus them” attitude.
- MAGIC encourages self-awareness and ongoing learning so that we put forth our personal best and continue to improve our skills.
- MAGIC is not about “sugarcoating” or being nice for nice’s sake. It is about a mindset and the skills necessary to interact effectively with others.
- MAGIC is, above all, about choice. You can choose to be MAGIC or tragic in any situation—it’s up to you.

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## About the Authors

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**Diane Berenbuam** is a Senior Vice-President and owner of Communico Ltd., and has helped foster and build strong, long-lasting client relationships for the company. An authority on marketing, communication and customer service training and development, Diane's work in these fields spans more than 25 years.

Diane has authored and co-authored numerous articles as well as delivered training and coaching services to both senior leadership teams and front line associates.

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Tom has presented at several industry leading conferences and symposiums, including The Gartner Summit, ICCM, The Call Center Exchange, CCNG, and others. Also, he was selected as a moderator for the White House Conference on Small Business for the state of Connecticut.



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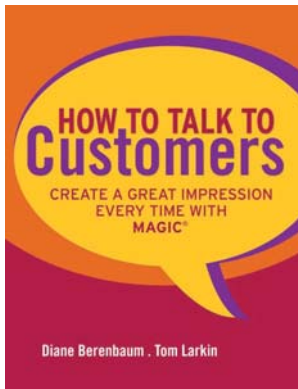
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## About the Book

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Every once in a while, we as consumers have a truly wonderful experience as a customer of a company. These interactions leave us feeling so positive about our purchase, our relationships with the company, and ourselves that we say, “The experience was magic!” From LL Bean to American Century Investments to Nordstrom there are a select few organizations—some that you have heard of and some that you haven’t—that serve their customers at world-class levels day in and day out.

*How to Talk to Customers* is the first book on customer service to outline step-by-step how specific world-class companies *Make A Great Impression on the Customer* every time with every customer. Just as important, the book shows how these wonderfully positive instances of customer contact create the key to long-term success: customer and employee loyalty.

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