

# The TOP 10 Absolutes of Customer Service



*Mary E. Schmidt, ABOC, CPO*  
*EyeSystems*

Absolute 1  
Who's the boss?

Customer service is about the patient not the policy. Never tell a patient "it is our policy." While I don't believe the patient is always right I do believe how you present information to the patient will dramatically impact how the patient perceives their care. If the policy exists to make it easier for you, rethink the policy. The experience should be positive for the patient and benefit their needs.

Absolute 2  
Listen Actively

Take the first 30 seconds with each patient contact to just listen. Ask a question, make eye contact, don't interrupt, complete their sentence, or look away. Give them your undivided attention for that short period of time and they will feel a connection with you that will change their entire experience in the practice. If this happened at the front desk check in, pre-test/special testing, in the exam room, optical/contact lens and check out, you will have invested an additional 2.5 minutes per patient. Practice this skill with your team, ask a question, then listen actively and experience how it makes both of you feel.

Absolute 3  
Anticipate Your Patients Need

What is does your patient think when they walk in your door? Is it clear which action to take, do they move forward, right or left? If there is confusion here, the patient will become defensive and react differently throughout the exam. Do they know what will happen in the pre-test room? Most people are fearful, especially of the "puff of air". What do you do to alleviate their fears? How do you communicate what is about to happen, clear explanations or just commands? How does that make the patient feel? What would the patient want to know?

#### Absolute 4 Value the Patient

What have you done for your loyal patients? So much time and effort is directed at capturing the new patient that we can sometimes neglect those most loyal to our practice. Meet with everyone on your team and put together a plan for “VIP” patients. Is there a small gift you could offer? It could relate to vision, maybe seeds to plant carrots in their garden or neon colored post-it notes. Think outside the box...it doesn't have to be optometry related. Investigate companies that offer, gift with purchase, and gather ideas from them. Brainstorm with your team to create a list of what your community and patients value and try to bring that into your promotion.

#### Absolute 5 Educate Your Patient

Teach your patient about what is the best you have to offer. The more information they have the better decision they will make. Patients don't want to be sold to but avoid being an order taker, always make sure they know value rather than price and doctor recommendation versus insurance coverage.

#### Absolute 6 Never Say No.

Even if you're saying no, phrase the sentence in a positive. “Do you take my insurance?” “We are currently not a provider on your plan but we would be happy to submit the paperwork for you to be reimbursed.” If you can't bill for them, possibly you know a provider in the community you can refer them to. Remember insurance coverages change but people will remember someone who was helpful for a long time.

#### Absolute 7 Apologize

Apologizing is not the same as accepting blame. If your patient has a bad experience you can empathize, apologize for their situation and offer solutions. “I am so sorry your insurance company requires this process too, we have choices, but your plan may not cover that. Would you like to know your other options?”

Absolute 8  
Exceed Expectations

What can you do to make the experience in your practice unique and amazing? Try to avoid cliché phrases about quality care and selection unless you can demonstrate it. Do you offer services no one else can? Do you carry product lines that can't be found at your competitors? Is there technology in your practice that no one else in your community provides? Get that message out, organize events, connect via social media, community outreach, you have to get them in the door and then knock their socks off.

Absolute 9  
Give feedback to the patient

How are they taking better care of their eyes? What have they done to ensure that they will have the best vision, healthiest eyes and long term health? Give them compliments on a job well done and reaffirm their good decisions. Dentist do this all the time at their patients regular check-ups, great job flossing, good care regime. It makes the patient proud and reinforces good behavior.

Absolute 10  
Treat everyone on your team well

Maybe this should be Absolute #1. Whether you're the doctor, leader or team member, the environment you create will reflect in the care given to patients. Treat each other well and with respect. If we are all happy we will extend that to our patients, invest the same amount of effort into staff care as you do patient care and you will be rewarded.

Post this list, strive to be your best, acknowledge those that excel!

Mary E. Schmidt, ABOC, CPO  
President  
EyeSystems  
[www.EyeSystems.info](http://www.EyeSystems.info)  
Mary@EyeSystems.info