You know bad customer service when you see it. You get put on hold listening to awful, canned music for far too long. A repairman arrives hours late. Your order is wrong and the clerk blames you. You get the sense that the people working in this company don’t care about their jobs or about you. At the very least, you expect the people with whom you do business to be polite and to do what they say they will. If they do even just a little bit more, you are likely to become a fan and loyal customer.

Good customer service is about building relationships through trust. It starts even before a customer walks through your door or picks up the phone to call you. You want the people with whom you interact to know that you are concerned first and foremost with what they need and how you can provide it.

Oriented for Customer Service

Creating a culture of customer service requires creating a vision. Why do you do what you do? Whom are you serving? What do these people need? How can you gain the trust you need in order to build a relationship with them?

An effective focus on customers comes from the very top of the organization. Leaders must be committed to the concept of providing good customer service, and they must encourage it throughout the department.

As a manager, the first people on your list of customers are your employees. If they are unhappy, it will be hard for them to ensure that their customers are happy. Talk to them about what is going well in the office. What could be done better? Are they getting the support they need to do their job?

Ask them to help create the vision for customer service. Get their ideas about what customers want and how best to help them. Empower them to address issues as they arise. It is best to deal with problems quickly, and that requires giving the people who interact with customers the authority and resources to solve them.
Improving customer service requires evaluating how customers are treated now and whether what we are doing is aligned with their needs. Here are some questions to start the process:

- What does good customer service look like for our department?
- Are we responsive? Do we answer the phone and return emails promptly?
- Do we set realistic expectations and keep our promises?
- Do we listen to our customers and show that we care about their needs?
- How do we deal with complaints?
- How do we handle mistakes?
- Are we helpful even if there is no immediate benefit to us?
- What extra can we offer?
- How do we find out whether people are satisfied with our service?

The Boston College University-Wide Performance Attributes and Competencies are used throughout the performance management process. They include providing good customer service:

**Customer Focus**
- Understands role of “customers” in the University environment
- Understands and responds quickly to needs of department and University customers
- Understands how own work activities impact customers’ view of University
- Addresses customers’ concerns with courtesy and respect; works to build a “win-win” relationship

**Additional Resources:**
*10 Steps to Successful Customer Service*, Maxine Kamin, American Society for Training & Development, February 2010