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## **Customer Service Can Make or Break Your Company**

*Unishippers of Houston Provides Tips for Superior Customer Service to Small and Mid-Sized Businesses*

**Houston, TX** - In today's competitive business world it isn't enough to simply provide the lowest prices to customers. Superior customer service can make or break your company.

Unishippers, one of the largest shipping resellers in the country, prides itself on being the trusted shipping advisor for many small businesses and provides a dedicated account team of Shipping Consultants at each local, franchise office to help individual customers efficiently and effectively navigate their shipping needs.

D'lea Nichols, co-owner of Unishippers of Houston, has excelled at customer service for the past 20 years. Nichols created and manages the Customer Service Department for her Unishippers franchise, a business that serves as a third party logistics solution for small and mid-sized businesses, and continually trains her staff to attain best practices.

News of Nichols' superior Customer Service Department spread and today she not only provides customer service for the three franchises that she and her partners personally own, but for 32 other Unishippers franchises in territories across the nation.

Satisfied customers have helped her business maintain one of the highest customer retention rates in a system of 285 franchise locations. Her Unishippers franchise was also awarded Top UPS Growth and the 2010 Top Franchise Award at the company's annual convention. With experience serving more than 17,000 businesses over 20 years, Nichols has come up with the following advice to help small and mid-sized businesses provide the best customer service.

1. **Mirror, mirror on the wall** – Nichols requires her customer service specialists train with a mirror in front of them when answering customer's calls. She maintains that this ensures that employees can practice smiling when they are talking with customers and that the smile can be "heard" over the phone line.
2. **MAGIC** – Learning this acronym by heart can create magic between your customer service agent and the customer;
  1. *Make a connection.* The best way to do this is to use the customer's name often.
  2. *Act positively.* Don't tell customers what you can't do; instead tell them what you CAN do.
  3. *Get to the heart of the matter.* This demands that your representative listen, listen, listen to the customer.

4. *Interpret the facts.* After listening, summarize the call and be specific. For instance, don't say "I'll call you back later," rather say "I'll call you back in two hours."
5. *Close with agreement.* Give next steps to the customer and follow through.
3. **Wait for the click** – Customers should always hang up the phone first. Nichols trains her agents to wait until they hear the click of the customer disconnecting from the call before hanging up. This technique makes sure that all of the customer's questions have been answered in the call and that the conversation never ends with a customer feeling like they have been "hung up on."
4. **You "sigh" you die** - According to Nichols, sighing is the biggest customer killer. It is the equivalent of rolling your eyes over the phone and can lead to complaints and potential firing.
5. **Invest in software** – Nichols uses Siebel-based software and recommends customer service software that is easy to use, permits notes to be taken and stored after every call and "tickles" your employees to remind them when it is time to follow up with customers.
6. **Retain good employees** – Engaged and happy employees will stay with a company longer, making them valuable for their knowledge as well as for building and maintaining valuable relationships with long term customers. Nichols maintains that it is no coincidence that many of her customers and employees have been with her for more than 15 years.

"The biggest mistake I've seen over the years is when a representative tries to defend themselves. It never works," said Nichols. "Trying to defend your products, services or actions with an unhappy customer only leads to the loss of that customer, revenue and time."

Which leads one to wonder if the old adage that the "customer is always right" should be the ultimate compass to use when navigating the tricky terrain of customer service.

## **About Unishippers**

Founded in 1987, Unishippers has grown to be one of the largest resellers of complete shipping services in the nation with more than 285 franchise locations. Headquartered in Salt Lake City, UT, the Unishippers concept is simple – work with major carriers including UPS<sup>®</sup>, Saia, Estes and YRC<sup>™</sup> to handle the pickup, transport and delivery of customers' shipments. All the while, local franchisees work to provide customers with service and support. By leveraging the combined shipping volume of all its customers, Unishippers gets deeply discounted rates from its carriers, resulting in lower shipping costs. Unishippers serves more than 50,000 small to mid-sized businesses annually, and has been recognized as a top franchise in 2009-2010 by *Entrepreneur*, *Franchise Times* and *AllBusiness*. For information on Unishippers, including information on franchising opportunities and price quotes, visit [www.unishippers.com](http://www.unishippers.com).