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HOW TO HIRE THE BEST CUSTOMER SUPPORT REPS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Customer service reps are the people your customers will have the most contact with, so you need to hire superstars.

1

Why You Should Care

Customer service matters. It affects your bottom line and how your brand is perceived by the public.

In the past, hiring a customer service rep was all about budget. The best and the brightest candidates were passed over in favor of individuals with less experience and motivation, simply because they were willing to work for lower pay. It's important to provide the best customer service to ensure that your customers receive the optimal experience.

In many cases, customer service reps are the face of the brand. They are the people your customers will have the most contact with, so you need to hire superstars. But ask any hiring manager and they will tell you that is easier said than done.

Zendesk has designed this guide to help you find the best talent for the job. How? By helping you understand what makes someone a great customer service rep, where to find that person, and how to hire them.

2

The Ultimate Customer Rep

What does the ultimate customer rep look like? Here are a few things to look for:

- **Skills** – email, social media, industry specific, general tech

- **Experience** – customer service, waiting tables, answering phones

- **Personality** – hard working, fun, thoughtful, patient, empathetic

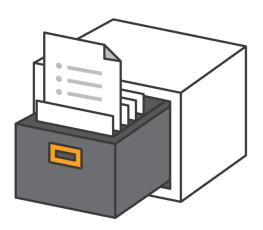- **X factor** – fits in with your team, likeable "way" about them

3

Writing a Job Requisition - Get it right from the beginning

Sometimes sitting down to write a job requisition can feel like a monumental task. You're setting out to build a great team, and your team is your greatest investment. There's a lot of pressure to get it right.

But it doesn't have to be that difficult. You can make it easier on yourself by not reinventing the wheel every time you need to post a job opening. Go through previous requisitions that you and the other hiring managers have written in the past. You can re-use any content that is still relevant, especially if it worked well once before. Even if you need to make a few edits, it's still less work than starting from scratch. If nothing else, you have a stake in the ground, which will make it easier to bring in collaborators. You can even hunt around online for examples of corresponding positions at similar companies and alter it to meet your own company culture.

Speaking of which, it's a good idea to get other people involved. Someone with a similar role or anyone who will be working directly with that person will have valuable input. Get together with them and make a list. On one side write down the minimum job requirements, and on the other side write what you see as bonus skills or attributes.

Now look at the list of requirements and ask yourselves, "Are we asking too much?" If so, you might need to shift some of the requirements into the bonus column. Keep at it until you've reached equilibrium.

This process will help you clearly define the role and your expectations. It's an opportunity to take a 360–degree look at the job—what part it will play in the company, the day–to–day functions, and growth opportunities. Also, since you want to attract someone who has the right personality, you should develop a clear idea of the company culture and apply it to every job requisition.

Finally, when all the stakeholders have signed off on the requisition, think about where you want to post it. Remember, your goal is not to attract a gazillion candidates. You want to attract the best candidates. Go beyond the careers page on your website. Do a little research to find the job posting sites and aggregators that are already being used by the kind of people you're looking for.

4

Cover Letter

It is becoming increasingly common for hiring managers to focus less on cover letters and more on resumes. However, while resumes are extremely important, they don't provide much in the way of context. When executed properly, a cover letter provides the contextual background that resumes usually lack.

Cover letters can help give insight into the information that the resume provides:

- Resumes often describe the candidate's work experience, but what were some other specific accomplishments? The cover letter might examine how the candidate collaborates or works independently.

- Job titles don't tell the whole story. Was the candidate a leader (either of colleagues or projects) even if the title doesn't suggest so?

- How is the candidate's education relevant? A few lines about something like this would go much further than a bullet note in a resume.

Perhaps most important, a cover letter is your first introduction to this person and might give you some insight into how they will conduct themselves on behalf of your company.

Here are a few key things to look for in a strong cover letter:

Writing skills – Is the letter clean, concise, and error-free? A well-written cover letter demonstrates care and attention to detail. More importantly, it shows that the candidate possesses the writing skills necessary for responding to customers via tickets, email, and chat.
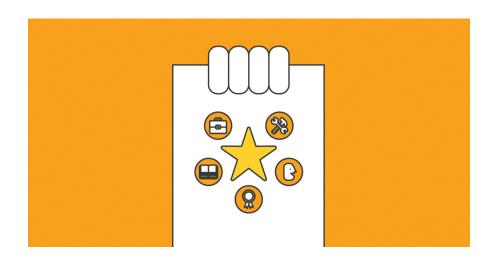
Enthusiasm and drive – Does the candidate want to work for you or are they just looking for a job? There's nothing wrong with someone who just wants a job. But between a lukewarm candidate with more qualifications and someone slightly less qualified who would be thrilled to join your company, the choice is obvious.

How do you know you're dealing with the latter and not the former? They'll tell you, and they'll illustrate their answers with examples of why they love your company.

A natural helper – A good cover letter will paint the picture of someone who enjoys helping others. Look for candidates that have tutored Grandma on how to send an email or spent time volunteering at a local after-school program.

A team player – The candidate has had ample time to compose their cover letter, so to some extent it can be seen as the most accurate representation of their personality. It's important to pay attention here, because whoever you hire will (hopefully) be with your company for a while. Will the other members of your team also feel that this candidate is a good fit?

5

The resume should show some interest and competence in your industry.

Resume

What's the difference between a great resume and one that falls flat? Check out the list below.

- A resume should never have typos or spelling mistakes. You don't want to entrust the faith of your customers and the reputation of your brand to someone who can't be bothered to proofread their own resume.

- The resume should show some interest and competence in your industry. If you're a tech company, they don't have to know how to write code, but they should at the very least be a fan and user of the tech in your field.

- A strong resume lists specific skills, either within an individual job description, a separate list, or both. Skills may include writing, computer program fluency,

or even personality traits. Again, the way this information is presented, as well as the information itself, is key.

- Don't simply adhere to hard and fast rules. Some people maintain that if a resume has Education listed at the top, for example, it's not as strong as a resume that lists Education last. Some say exactly the opposite. It depends; not everything about a resume should be judged by a strict rule. Creativity and originality matter. However…

- All of the essentials should be there – experience, education, and even hobbies if they're relevant. Skateboarding is not; starting a free weekend class teaching skateboarding to senior citizens might be.

6

Phone Screen

It's hard to get to know someone in one 15–20 minute phone call. Yet, as the person responsible for hiring new support staff in your organization, this is something you'll be doing regularly. In that single phone call you're expected to ask the right questions, listen for the right answers, and figure out if that candidate will be a perfect match for the role and for your organization. It's a tough task.

Great service can be your bread and butter, so it's important to have the best people in the role of customer service representative. When you screen a candidate, it is good if the phone call involves a great conversation with a ton of enthusiasm and personality. Listen for a candidate who's knowledgeable about your organization and excited about the position. Although brief, the phone screen can provide a lot of insight into the potential culture fit of that person. And if they've made a positive impression, it's worth going to the next step.

With that in mind, here are five traits to listen for during your next phone screen:

- Enthusiasm

- An engaging personality

- Good social etiquette – They know when to talk and when to listen.

- Appropriate answers – Some questions require long answers, others require short ones. The important thing is that the answers are adequate.

- Passion – They are compelled to help others.

7

Interview – Part 1

While an interview provides a great opportunity to learn about the candidate's skills and abilities, it's equally, if not more important, to make sure that they are also a good match for your organization.

As you should throughout the entire interview process, ask yourself, is this person:

- a good cultural fit

- calm and personable

- excited to be there/about the position

- able to stay on track and fully answer your questions

- willing to provide specific, real life examples

- well mannered – maintains eye contact, doesn't interrupt, shake hands, etc.

Just like a candidate, you want to give a good impression in the interview and stand out as a representative of your company.

Differentiate your interview by asking the right questions.

Interviews are short so you should try to ask probing questions. The deeper you can go, the better and more useful your time will be spent.

Make your candidate feel comfortable. If you tell them a little about yourself, or have comments to add, it makes the interview seem more like a conversation rather than a one-sided review. If they feel comfortable they are more likely to share information. And even if this information isn't verbal, it can still teach you about their personality.

Don't just ask hypothetical questions. Getting answers to questions about actual scenarios will paint a picture of how the candidate deals with real world situations. This will also encourage the candidate to give creative, thoughtful responses that will help illuminate how they think.

Did they sign up for a free trial or in some way interact with the company/product? Doing so shows initiative and genuine excitement at the prospect of working for your company.

Finally, consider who in the company is going to conduct the actual interviews. In addition to several levels of management, you should also have the candidate's potential peers interview them as well. This helps ensure that they will be able to work together.

8

Interview - Part 2: Put Them to Work

You want to make sure that the candidate is a good cultural fit with your team and has the requisite skills and background on their resume, but more than anything, you need to make sure that they are capable of doing the actual job.

The best way to do this is to give them an assignment: have them work on two tickets. Don't give them fake tickets that exist only for the purposes of the exercise. Give them two real tickets.

But don't give them just any tickets. Give them one ticket that provides good feedback to your company and one that gives mediocre or slightly negative feedback. Remove the names, dates, etc. and have them respond to the tickets. Give clear instructions and an exact time frame to work on them. Then go over the tickets, offering positive and constructive feedback.

The reason you want to give them one good and one mediocre ticket is because those ticket types are more challenging. Tickets that are clearly negative tend to be easier to critique because they are more direct. Positive and neutral tickets are more subtle and often require more thought.

While you are looking at how they critique the two tickets, the most important aspect of this exercise is the feedback you give them. Ask yourself: Are they comfortable taking feedback? Did they make you feel comfortable while giving it?

If they listened carefully, and you feel like they used your comments as an opportunity to learn and grow as an advocate, then you are probably looking at a strong candidate. If your feedback only annoys and agitates them, this person is probably not going to be a good fit.

9

Making a Decision

When it's time to make your decision, you and the interview team should review some things from every step of the process:

- Are they passionate?

- Do they have a wide variety of interests and hobbies?

- Do they enjoy helping people?

- Do they really, really want to work for your company?

- Will they onboard quickly?

- Are they a good cultural fit? Will they get along with you and the rest of the team?

- Are you enthusiastic about the prospect of this person representing the company, its value, and its mission to every customer they provide support to?

If you've answered all of these questions and you're not 100% sure that you want to hire this person, the answer is "no." It might seem rough, but don't hire someone if you're even a little unsure.

In general, your decision will boil down to one of four answers:

✔ **Yes** – hire

✘ **No** – don't hire

No, but refer to another position – If a candidate is a great cultural match but not the right fit for this exact position, their skills might align better with a different open position within the company. Consider referring them.

Yes, but not now – In any given round of hiring, it is possible that there will be more viable candidates than there are openings. Think of this as an opportunity. Make an offer to the best candidates and put the rest in a "repository" for the future. That way when it comes time to hire more, you won't necessarily have to go through the entire hiring process again.

Also you might find yourself in situations where you need to temporarily increase the size of your team, such as holidays, busy seasons, etc. Again, you'll already have a list to pull from to offer short–term employment.

10

Conclusion

Your support team is a living thing: it will grow, mature, and adapt to new challenges. Hopefully we've given you everything you need to pick the best individuals to make the best possible team, one that will represent the values of your company and always make the customer their highest priority.