

“Empathy is an important aspect of customer-facing jobs, and it will only become more important as companies place a greater emphasis on making customer interactions feel natural and effective. Explain how empathy has helped you become a better CSR. Give three examples of how you've used empathy in your role and describe the positive effects it's had on your organization.”

2023 Outstanding CSR of the Year Essay

By Jennifer DeGeorge, CIC

In 2020 my world changed significantly along with everyone else. As we all adjusted to the new normal, I grew within my role as a customer service professional. I found that while a client may have called for answers on what was going to happen to their business during the pandemic, what they really wanted was someone who would listen to their concerns. Being able to show empathy towards my clients became the most important asset I possessed. Throughout the pandemic's ever-changing environment, I learned when people call customer service, they want to feel heard and understood. Sometimes they need to feel they matter more than they want to have an immediate solution. When my clients feel heard and understood, they grow to trust me as more than a just customer service representative answering a phone.

In times of uncertainty, clients rely on me to be an ear or a shoulder to lean on. A client recently experienced a cybercriminal take thousands of dollars from their account. She was in a panic, worried the money wouldn't be returned. Instead of jumping in to ask questions needed to submit a claim, I asked her if she was okay. We walked through the coverages within her policy and explained where we were going to ask the adjuster to utilize coverage. She was relieved I took the time to walk through the process with her. When the claim was settled, she reached out to thank me for “holding her hand” through a scary situation. We reviewed together how the claim was handled and noticed that coverage from a property enhancement, with a higher deductible and lower limit was used instead of the scheduled coverage, which had a higher limit and lower deductible. I reached out to the adjuster regarding better coverage being available and she agreed to pay out the remainder of the recoverable money. In taking the extra time and being empathetic towards their concerns not only before, but during and after the claim, reassured the client I was there for her. It reinforced our relationship and why their company continues to partner with us at Vizance.

While I don't anticipate hugs from clients, I will accept one as a thank you. A client was non-renewed this year, an event we were not anticipating. When we sat down with the client, we had a proactive plan prepared to give them peace of mind. The family voiced their concerns; what was going to happen? Could we find a market for them with a non-renewal out there? I guided them through the conversations I had with potential carriers already, let them know their concerns were valid, and that we were not going to let them be without insurance. After we walked through all the possible solutions and our action plan, we were ready to hit the road. The owner shook hands with the advisor, turned to me and she asked “Can I hug you? You're always so helpful and make me feel better”. Absolutely! By showing empathy during this time of the unknown and coming to the table prepared it showed how much I care about them and their business. Because of these actions, they trusted us to find them a solution and not take their account to other agencies for quotes. This is part of why I love my job, I truly get to make a difference in my clients' lives.

Not only do I show empathy towards my clients, but my empathy also shows internally in our office. We have a “teaching hospital” mentality, therefore we hire a lot of associates who are new to insurance. For someone coming back to the workforce after a long hiatus, risk management insurance can be very overwhelming. In working with a new associate, she expressed frustration, confusion, and even tears at times. I was there. I sat with her for hours at a time, guiding her through the role, letting her vent her emotions so she could have a clear headspace to carry on. Even when she felt like giving up, she didn’t, because she knew she had a support system encouraging her. Me being there for an associate who needs some extra support allows for our organization to continue growing by providing a nurturing environment for associates to get better and learn, no matter what their experience level may be.

A large part of my role as a Client Service Advisor is being an empathetic listener. Insurance isn’t usually someone’s favorite part of owning a business, it’s something they’re required to have. I’m not the person they call because they want to share good news - it’s often when something unexpected happens. I’m here to not only help complete the puzzle at hand, but to be there during a time of need. Being empathic towards my clients is one of the most important characteristics in being a customer service professional to ensure a client feels heard and understood. I love my position as a Client Service Advisor and my ability to empathize has led to strong, lasting relationships with my clients. My goal is to change the outlook on the insurance industry one positive interaction at a time.