

As a help desk technician, you could very well be a hero to your user today! Your job is incredibly important, because you are often the bridge between where a user is on a project and where s/he wants to be.

You even have the power to help your users have a great day by solving their problems and freeing them to think more creatively and be more productive in their jobs.

There are many studies that have shown how well-trained help desk personnel add directly to a company's bottom line by helping employees work more productively and creatively.

Here are ten simple and practical techniques you can put to use today to start making a positive difference in peoples' lives.

1. Respond quickly. Quick responses can take several forms. Ideally, you simply answer the phone and solve the problem.

Anyone who has spent any time in a help desk position knows that's not always possible, so what other options exist?

Automated voice response systems that let callers know about how long they should expect to wait are great; email responses that do the same thing are also great.

The key is to inform users as to the approximate wait time until they get a response.

Armed with accurate information, users can then make an informed decision as to whether to wait on hold or hang up and call back later.

If they're communicating via email, they can make a decision about whether to wait for a response or move on to another project and return to the one requiring support at a later time.

2. First impressions count. Start the call or in-person visit with a pleasant, professional greeting and for heaven's sake, be real! In other words, a simple, "Hello, this is Don Crawley.

"May I help you?" is far better than some contrived greeting such as, "Hello, this is Don Crawley.

"How may I provide excellent service to you today?"

(If your organization requires you to say specific words in your greeting, work on making them genuine.

Nothing is worse than hearing someone answer the phone reading a script in a monotone voice or a condescending tone.

When you're forced to use a standardized greeting, try to understand your employer's intent in requiring the standardized greeting.

Even if you think the words you're required to say are phony, your employer's intent is not phony; your employer wants you to deliver excellent service, so find a way to believe it and mean it when you say it.

Make it real!)

3. Display honest competence. Tell callers that you'll either fix their problem, find someone who can, or find a workaround. No one has all the answers and no one expects you to have all the answers.

They do, however, expect you to be familiar with common troubleshooting techniques, to be honest about your abilities, and to be honest when you don't know the answer.

4. Reassure your users that you're committed to solving their problems. Saying things like, "Tracy, I'm creating a file on this issue so I can follow up on it and make sure we solve it for you", assures your user that you're taking ownership of their problem.

In fact, when you say those exact words, "I'm taking ownership of this issue", you tell your users that you're with them and you're going to see the issue through to some sort of resolution, whether it's actually solving the problem, escalating it, or developing a work-around.

5. Keep it positive. Focus on what you **WILL** do instead of what you **WON'T** do. Keep the conversation upbeat, even when the user wants to complain about things unrelated to the problem at hand.

Your user doesn't want to hear you complain about computers, Microsoft, the company, or any of the myriad things people complain about.

Dare to be different and avoid the temptation to join users in their complaining.

6. Empathize with your user. You can empathize without complaining. Use empathetic statements like, "I don't blame you.

I'd be frustrated too, if that happened to me."

Ross Shafer says people don't want customer  
*service*  
as much as they want customer  
*empathy*  
.

Imagine how you'd feel if you were under deadline and a document failed to print.

Imagine how you'd feel if you were trying to get out the door and your computer locked up.

Remember the three "S's":

Keep it sincere, short, and then deliver a solution (or at least a workaround).

7. Be gracious. Similar to empathy, graciousness helps endear you to users; it lets users know you appreciate them and what they're going through in trying to do their job.

As you're working on their problems, thank them for calling and let them know how much you appreciate the opportunity to help.

(The reality is that, when they call and ask us to help, we can often head off bigger problems down the road.

We really DO appreciate the opportunity, because it can save us a lot of time and frustration in the future!)

As always, be careful to be sincere.

People can easily detect insincerity.

8. Be respectful. Thanks to the mass media, our society has become disrespectful. It's not necessary to respect someone in order to treat them respectfully.

In the movie, "The Green Mile", Tom Hanks' character treats condemned criminals on death row with respect.

Certainly, persuasive arguments can be made that the condemned men with whom he dealt were not deserving of respect, but he treated them respectfully anyway.

People tend to behave the way you expect them to.

Often, the way you're treated is a mirror of how you treat others.

9. Offer one bonus tip: This could be something new that you've discovered in a widely-used application such as Microsoft Outlook or a new resource available on the company's network. Use good judgment on this; if your user is obviously in a hurry to get back to work, save your bonus tip for later.

If, on the other hand, you've established rapport with your user, offer a bonus tip by saying something like, "By the way, Pat, we're letting everyone know about a way to color code appointments in Outlook.

It's really easy and people seem to use it a lot once they know about it.

Are you aware of this?"

10. Remember, the final three questions: "Have I solved your problem?", "Are you satisfied with the way I handled this incident?", and "Is there anything I could have done better?"

I often recommend starting the session by telling the user that you'll be asking those three questions at the end of the session.

As with all things, be sensitive to your users' mood and circumstance. If they're obviously in a hurry or angry, avoid small talk and say something like, "I can tell you're in a hurry, so I'm going to be respectful of your time and just get to work on your problem." or, "I can tell you're upset right now. I don't blame you at all, so I'm going to get right to work on solving this issue."

Be sure to punctuate lengthy periods of silence with comments like, "I'm not ignoring you; I'm still working on this problem."

If the person with whom you're dealing is technically sophisticated, you could even let him/her know what you're doing.

If, on the other hand, the user is not technically sophisticated, just let him/her know you're not ignoring them.

Above all, remember that our jobs in information systems and technology are not about technology at all; they're about delivering creative solutions to workplace problems. Everything revolves around our users.

We have to help them be more productive and creative in their jobs by helping them be more proficient with the tools of information systems and technology.