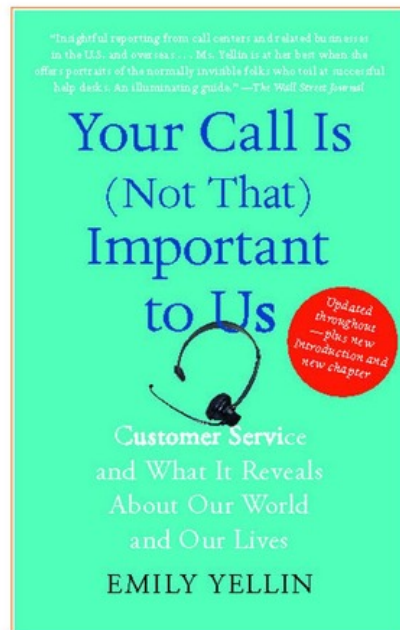




Your Call Is (Not That) Important to Us: Customer Service and What It Reveals About Our World and Our Lives

Emily Yellin

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Whether it's the interminable hold times, the multitude of buttons to press, or the automated voices before reaching someone with a measurable pulse—who hasn't felt exasperated at the abuse, neglect, and wasted time when all we want is help, and maybe a little human kindness? *Your Call Is (not that) Important to Us* is journalist Emily Yellin's highly entertaining and far-reaching exploration of the multibillion-dollar customer service industry and its surprising inner-workings. Since customer service has a role in just about every industry on earth, Yellin travels the country and the world, meeting a wide range of customer service reps, corporate decision makers, industry watchers, and Internet-based consumer activists. She shows the myriad forces that converge to create these aggravating experiences and the people inside and outside the globalized corporate world crusading to make customer service better for us all. Because of the fast-moving nature of the industry, the paperback will be revised and updated throughout, including a fresh Introduction.

For the first time, Yellin gets at the heart of the human stories behind the often inhuman face of call-center customer service—and why customer service doesn't have to be this bad.

Your Call Is (Not That) Important to Us: Customer Service and What It Reveals About Our World and Our Lives Details

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Kater Cheek says

Let's be honest: customer service is not an intrinsically interesting subject for most people. So the fact that I liked this book and enjoyed reading it to the end is a testament to Emily Yellin's skill as a writer. Look for her.

The book talks about the customer service industry, mostly about call centers. It talks about it from the customer service rep's point of view, and sometimes from the customer's point of view, but always with an eye towards how to improve business.

One of the companies she interviewed was FedEx. The employee talked about their high commitment to customer service, and about how they based their company around it. I found this very ironic, because FedEx is one of the few companies I will absolutely refuse to patronize on account of several negative experiences with them. I hate them.

Having her cast FedEx in a positive light colored my faith in the rest of the book but not too much to dislike reading it.

Mark says

This book is just dull. While there are some entertaining discussions about companies who clearly are terrible at customer service, the author spends most of her time visiting several companies to see how each addresses its customer service needs. The problem with this, of course, is that only companies that are known for having good customer service are willing to allow a writer in to observe their operations. This is what makes the book so dull. There is very little insight to be gained from interviewing people who like their jobs and who work for companies who take customer service seriously, because those companies are in the minority. I think a topic like this would have benefited greatly from an undercover Barbara Ehrenreich approach.

Another drawback of the book is that the author discusses customer service at call centers while barely touching upon person to person customer service, which is still a big part of everyone's life.

Oscar Romero says

Thank you Emily....you sure did an amazing job not only gathering this quite interesting data--but the way you write it, it is phenomenal and so engaging...I love it!

Customer service, even though it has been around since forever, seems to be the most misunderstood topic nowadays--and the proof is in the fact that we still get horrible customer service still. The biggest problem I

see, is that whomever is giving it--doesn't even realize it is their fault! Thank you for writing this amazing book--I am certain it will help many of us trying to improve customer service in our business.

Strongly recommend this book for anyone trying to learn about how to better ourselves, as a person, as a team, as a company, as a community, a city, a country... and improve our customer service habits.

Skip says

Emily Yellin has written a very easy-to-understand overview (from a layman's standpoint) of telephone customer service (the best and worst practitioners). Meticulously researched, on several continents, from FedEx call centers in the United States to outbound call centers in Argentina and Egypt, she digs deep into the whole process and development of this customer call service industry. She finds the answers to questions about why when we call a number in our own city we might find ourselves being transferred to an outbound call center in another country. She also looks at best practices among companies as diverse as zappos.com and Fedex to pinpoint why these companies do it right.

Charli says

This is a subject I'm quite interested in, both personally and professionally. Outsourcing customer service is a major concern in America. It was intriguing to find out that there are a number of people doing customer service from their homes, as opposed to cubicle farms. There are some good customer service practices to follow and a real human element to the call center employees, but you have to wade through an awful lot to get there. I found myself skimming most of the background information on companies to get to the personal stories of customers and their reps.

Although this is a noble effort, unfortunately, reading it was much like reading my history textbook in school; it took a subject that has a ton of juicy possibility into dry as dust territory.

Color me disappointed.

Michelle says

I wanted to like this book a lot more than I did. It started off being exactly what I realized (as I was reading)that I wanted it to be--personal stories of things that happen in customer service and why they happen the way they do. It just really slow in the middle, and I had to force myself to finish it. I watched Outsourced, a comedy about a guy who has to help set up a call center in India, in the middle of reading this book, so maybe that's why it got more interesting for me at the end--I had that humorous experience to compare it to. Now I'm on the lookout for a book with personal stories about customer service...

Betty says

This book is very interesting. It sheds light on a topic that I have been thinking about for a long time. Obviously I'm not the only person. It was really lovely to read about the history of call centers, and the

progression of history that has led us to how we think about and interact with customer service representatives.

What I enjoyed was that it really is impartial. The author actually just reported the facts of what people are saying about this subject without waxing poetical about how great this is or how evil that is. It was very refreshing. Also there is major information, and citation which I found very cool. I'm surprised by how few authors actually do that anymore.

Sometimes she repeats herself but that's not too surprising considering that a lot of the book is quotations about how other people feel about this subject.

The thing that bugged me reading it was the realization that Americans, have all been relegated to customers rather than people. This is never actually stated during the book but when company reps talk about being kind and doing right, they only do so in relation to the power that a person has as a customer to hurt their companies bottom line. There is no discussion about doing right or ethics by companies only a focus on how to get what the company wants out of the customer while still making the customer happy. Even as they move towards doing right they do so while still thinking in the the very patterns that make customers feel angry and alienated in the first place.

A good book if you are interested in knowing whats going on behind company doors.

Fred says

This is an interesting read that gives a history of customer service and the technologies surrounding it. There are many case studies of companies that have succeeded by making it a focus and others that have faced public relations disasters due to their mishandling of customer support. The book also examines how social media continues to change the way that customer service is managed.

Paul says

Interesting look at customer service, with a look at some of the problems and questions involved. The book's fascinating because it gives you a look at the issue from both the customer's and the business' perspective, and it deals with "hot button" issues like outsourcing and automated answering systems without being too biased toward either side of the debate. The book's short on solutions to the problems that it brings up, but it's a good introduction to a part of big business that we're often too upset about to really consider.

Elizabeth says

this is an invaluable book and tool for anyone who works in the customer service industry, including me! this not only articulates what i experience at work but it also expresses what i experience as a customer when i call into a company, helpless and looking for some answers regarding a recent purchase. This book covers the origin of customer service all the way up till today's concept of it-both the good and bad. i also found the international customer service rep vignettes featured in chapter 6 really eye opening.

Nicholas Ferrante says

Much like most business books, this could've easily been a feature story in a magazine. I was hoping this book would dig into the alienating aspects of big business and how it drives both people on the end of the customer service transaction towards incivility (the end consumer calling in with a problem, and the over-worked, under-paid, complete lack of autonomy customer service rep cog at the other end of the phone). This was only briefly touched upon in reference to a handful of physiological studies displaying the mental health issues derived from constant fake happiness on the phone and being berated on a daily basis by a distant voice.

The book mostly focuses on 'best practice' call centers like Amazon and Zappos and their empowerment of their employees.

If you've worked in a call center before or are some sort of dinosaur manager that needs to realize that customer service is not a cost-center but rather a really important part of the marketing mix, this book may be for you.

Linda says

To read a good review, press one.

To read a bad review, press two.

To accidentally disconnect this call, so that it takes you another twenty minutes to get back to this point in the menu, press three.

To launch a small nuclear device at our corporate headquarters, press four.

I was hoping for more personal customer service horror stories from this book. It was still interesting and informative, though limited strictly to information about customer service by phone. (Perhaps the author is saving poor in-person customer service for another volume.) Having sat on both sides of the customer service fence, I know how tough it is to merely please some of the people some of the time. That knowledge doesn't make me any happier when I get trapped inside endlessly looping phone menus, however.

Brian says

Read this if you're in the mood for hearing some amusing rants about customer service via call centre and internet, from both outside and inside the industry. Much of the research and anecdotes in the book lead to common sense conclusions you'd already expect, but it's comforting to have them articulated and confirmed. Yes, there really are people out there who do believe in better service!

I think my favourite chapter was the exploration of Interactive Voice Response systems. I loved reading some of the quotes aloud, trying to mimic the tone of an unflappable IVR system which constantly apologizes for not hearing you right!

Rachel says

The title of this book made me giggle out loud when I saw it - who hasn't felt that this is secretly what the recorded voice means when you're on hold? Emily Yellin has done a great job of finding out why companies have lost touch with how to interact with customers and what effects that has on their bottom line. She has also learned a lot about what makes normal people turn into screaming banshees when they have to call customer service. Both approaches are interesting, but what I liked best about this book were the anecdotes - both good and bad - of actual customer service experiences. The bad include Vincent Ferrari trying to cancel AOL (which was covered by The Today Show) and the good includes escalation reps at FedEx going above and beyond their duties to make good on things that went wrong.

I discovered an entire obsolete profession - the "hello girl" -- that I'm now fascinated by/obsessed with. (The first telephone operators were teenage boys, transferred over from the telegraph lines. But they were rude and boisterous, so young women were hired to take their places answering all the new-fangled telephone calls.) I also learned (I don't know why I didn't realize this before) that the automated phone systems everywhere aren't computer-generated - they are done by real voice actors, who record each number three times, as the beginning, middle, and end of a sequence. Who knew?

Overall, what this book drove home was how complicated life has become. The very fact that we have so many problems with companies that we have to outsource the people who deal with our questions and complaints just boggles the mind, if you think about it. When I think back on my worst customer service moments, I would wish that every executive director of customer service would read this book.

ST says

A must read for anyone who has ever wasted more than an hour holding on an 800 customer "service" number. This book is as important and revealing as The Hidden Persuaders.
