

Career Profile



VIDEO COVERAGE
Gayle Placzek speaks at
<http://www.chroniclet.com/Nie>

A weekly series devoted to providing information on career exploration

Do You Like

- Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, and asking questions as appropriate?
- Talking to others to convey information effectively?
- Managing one's own time and the time of others?
- Actively looking for ways to help people?
- Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems?

Then This Could Be The Career For You!

The Type of Work

- Confer with customers by telephone or in person in order to provide information about products and services, to take orders or cancel accounts, or to obtain details of complaints.
- Keep records of customer interactions and transactions, recording details of inquiries, complaints, and comments, as well as actions taken.
- Resolve customers' service or billing complaints by performing activities such as exchanging merchandise, refunding money, and adjusting bills.
- Check to ensure that appropriate changes were made to resolve customers' problems.
- Contact customers to respond to inquiries or to notify them of claim investigation results and any planned adjustments.
- Refer unresolved customer grievances to designated departments for further investigation.
- Complete contract forms, prepare change of address records, and issue service discontinuance orders, using computers.

Pathways to Success

Most customer service representative jobs require only a high school diploma. However, because employers are demanding a higher skilled workforce, many customer service jobs now require an associate or bachelor's degree. High school and college level courses in computers, English, or business are helpful in preparing for a job in customer service.

Training requirements vary by industry. Almost all customer service representatives are provided with some training prior to beginning work. This training generally includes customer service and phone skills; information on products and services; information about common customer problems; the use of the telephone and computer systems; and company policies and regulations. Length of training varies, but usually lasts at least several weeks. Because of a constant need to update skills and knowledge, most customer service representatives continue to receive training throughout their career.

Because customer service reps constantly interact with the public, good communication and problem-solving skills are a must. Verbal communication and listening skills are especially important. For workers who communicate through e-mail, good typing, spelling, and writing skills are necessary.

What Employers Look For

Individuals who:

- Accept criticism and deal calmly and effectively with high stress situations.
- Possess knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
- Are pleasant with others on the job and display a good-natured, cooperative attitude.
- Are reliable, responsible, and dependable, and fulfilling obligations.
- Are careful about detail and thorough in completing work tasks.
- Possess knowledge of administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.

Job Outlook

Customer service representatives held about

2.2 million jobs in 2006. Although they were found in a variety of industries, about 23 percent of customer service representatives worked in finance and insurance.

About 14 percent of customer service reps were employed in administrative and support services. Another 11 percent of were employed in retail trade establishments such as general merchandise stores and food and beverage stores. Other industries that employ significant numbers of customer service reps include information, particularly the telecommunications industry; manufacturing, such as printing and related support activities; and wholesale trade.

Customer service representatives are expected to experience growth that is much faster than the average, approximately 25% nationwide and 16% in Ohio. Furthermore, job prospects should be excellent as workers who leave the occupation will need to be replaced.

Earnings Potential

Location	Year	Pay Period	Low	Median	High
United States	2006	Yearly	\$18,100	\$28,300	\$46,000
Ohio	2006	Yearly	\$18,300	\$28,400	\$44,900
Cleveland Elyria-Mentor, OH MSA	2006	Yearly	\$19,100	\$29,600	\$46,100

Source: Occupational Information Network, O*Net Online, <http://online.onetcenter.org>



Customer Service Representative

DEFINITION: Interact with customers to provide information in response to inquiries about products and services and to handle and resolve complaints.

NAME: Gayle Placzek

COMPANY: Wal-Mart, Elyria

Q. When you were a young child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A. As a child, I wanted to be a nurse. I always wanted to take care of people, but realized I do not handle pain and suffering very well.

Q. How did you become interested in your particular field?

A. I observed others in the position and knew I would enjoy the fast pace and the opportunity to problem solve and help create a better shopping experience for our customers.

Q. Who or what influenced your decision the most and why?

A. I have been very fortunate to work for management that had confidence in me and convinced me to accept the challenge and make a difference.

Q. What is your educational background?

A. I graduated high school in Rockwood, TN. I have taken various classes and job-related courses throughout the years.

Q. What was the most critical class or training you took and why?

A. While formal education and training are important, I believe my on-the-job training has better prepared me to understand customers' expectations and needs.

Q. How did you get to where you are today? What path did your employment journey take?

A. I have worked from the age of 15. I have worked in a sock factory, spent four years in the United States Air Force, 5 years as an account clerk for Sacramento County before moving to Ohio. I answered the 'Help Wanted' sign in Wal-Mart's window twelve years ago and have been here ever since.

Q. What skills or certifications do you think are needed to be successful in this field?

A. You must be able to juggle several tasks at once, handle money and be able to communicate with people.

Q. Did you have any words of advice for someone considering a career in your field?

A. Treat everyone with dignity and respect. Any problems a customer or associate has should not be treated as small or insignificant. Maintain a sense of humor – ALWAYS!

Local Education Websites

Lorain County JVS
High School & Adult Career Center Programs
www.lcjvs.com
www.lcjvs.com/adult

Lorain County Community College
www.lorainccc.edu

Sources: Occupational Information Network, O*Net Online, <http://online.onetcenter.org>.** U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, <http://stats.bls.gov/oco>