



Product

23 Interview Questions You Should Ask Every Customer Service Candidate



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How can you tell if that smart and eager customer service candidate will be an engaged and productive team member?

Short of inventing a time machine there's no guaranteed method, which makes your interview one of the most important tools you have to vet customer service and support candidates.

The right interview questions reveal more useful information about

a candidate than their work history, because they force interviewees to think on their feet, drawing on their experience to answer pointed questions. Seeing how they react speaks volumes about how they will handle real-life situations, and will help you avoid wasting time and energy on hiring the wrong person.

Divide these interview questions among your hiring team, and you'll get the information you need to hire top customer service talent. If you're not sure what to look for in the answers to customer service questions, we've provided some guidance for each question group below.

23 customer service interview questions every hiring manager should ask

Approach to customer service

1. What does good customer service mean to you?
2. What appeals to you about this role specifically?
3. What's the best customer service you've ever received? Why?
4. Can you tell me about a time you received poor customer service?
5. Is there a difference between customer service and customer support?

Here you're looking to find people who share your underlying

beliefs about the role customer service plays in an organization. You will know what you consider to be great service, does your candidate have the same high expectations?

A good candidate will be able to explain why customer service matters to a business and be able to give clear examples of good and bad service. They should be prepared to talk about your specific company, and how customer service might contribute to its success.

Watch out for people who really want a different role, but see customer service as the easiest way to get a foot in the door. They'll be less likely to have thought through what great customer service means to a business.

Emotional intelligence, empathy and behavior

6. Can you tell me about a time when you were proud of the level of service you gave a customer?
7. Have you ever dealt with an unreasonable customer? How did you handle it, and how would you handle it today?
8. Have you ever bent the rules in assisting a customer? Tell me the situation and the outcome.
9. In your past work, have you ever received negative feedback from a customer? What did you do with that feedback?
10. Can you tell me about a customer that you found difficult to understand, and how you approached that interaction?
11. Can you describe a time when you had to say "no" to an important customer's request?

12. What's the best way to help a customer who has worked with multiple agents and hasn't received the help they need?

In this section, you need to hear specific, true stories of past service experiences. Even a very junior candidate may have prior retail experience to draw on.

A good candidate will share detailed examples from their own experiences, and be able to answer follow up questions on those examples. Look for people who show humility and take responsibility for their mistakes.

Watch out for people who give theoretical examples rather than real situations or who only provide examples where the customer or their colleagues were at fault.

Related: [The complete guide to hiring your customer service dream team](#) >

Problem solving

13. Have you had a time when a customer was reporting a technical issue that you didn't know the answer to? What was your approach, and how did it end up?
14. Can you tell me about a situation with a customer when there wasn't a clear policy to use, and you needed to make a judgement call? How did you approach your decision, and what happened?
15. Can you give me an example of a situation where there were

major problems with your product/service, and you needed to respond without having all the answers yet?

Problem solving is an invaluable skill, and one that can always be improved. The best candidates will be able to walk you through their approach to situations in which they didn't immediately have an answer. Ask them for examples of how they learned from those situations, and applied it to another problem.

Beware of people who claim never to have been stumped or who can only give examples where a team or colleague provided the final answer.

Communication skills

- 16.** Can you give an example of how you handled alerting a customer when your product/service caused a major problem?
- 17.** When responding to a customer, how do you decide what information to include, and what to leave out?
- 18.** Can you tell me about a time when you needed to convince a customer or a teammate to change the way they were working (e.g., adopt a new procedure or modify their language), and how you went about that?

There is no greater skill for customer service employees than the ability to communicate clearly, and with the appropriate level of detail. This section is an opportunity for your best candidates to stand out by explaining how they talk or write to customers.

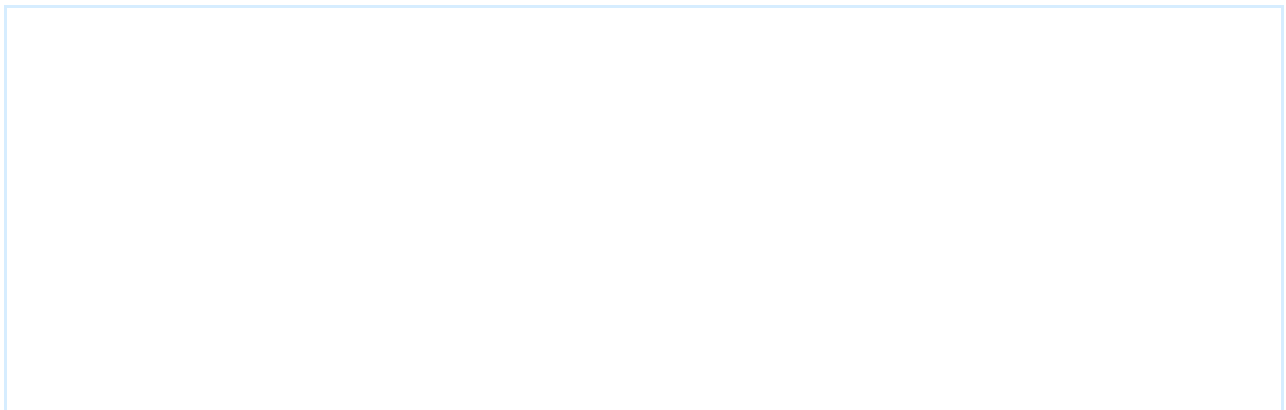
Great candidates will show an ability to interpret a customer's needs

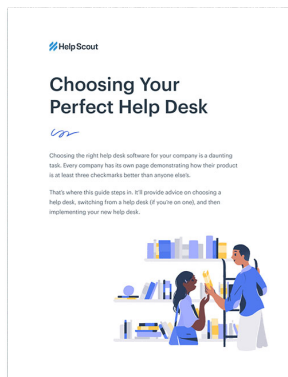
and modify their communication style for different audiences. Look out for candidates who can only describe a single communication approach, as they may be too inflexible.

Attitude and approach to work

- 19.** What's the last new skill you learned? Why did you choose that skill, and how did you learn it?
- 20.** Can you tell me about a time when you made a great contribution to your team?
- 21.** What's the next book I should read? Why?
- 22.** What are you better at today than you were this time last year?
- 23.** What do you think makes a good teammate?

This final section is a chance to understand what this candidate would be like to work with. Are they always looking to learn new skills? Will they be supportive of their colleagues as well as customers? People who can talk about their interests and carry on a casual conversation typically perform well in a customer service role.





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Make your customer service interviews more than just question and answer sessions

The best interviews are not strict question-and-answer patterns; they're structured conversations that draw out candidates' attitudes, strengths and challenges.

Encourage candidates to use a storytelling approach: Tell them you're not looking for hypothetical "this is what I would do if that happened" answers. Ask for specific, detailed stories about their customer support experiences and their behaviors in those

situations. Ask them about times they've been a customer and experienced great (or terrible!) service.

Don't be afraid to dig deeper: Your questions are only starting places for conversational topics. If the answer is interesting or concerning, ask follow-up questions to uncover more details.

It's OK to ask similar questions: Often the best stories will come out when a candidate has had a few minutes to think about an earlier question. By revisiting important areas, you give them the best chance to reveal their character and skill to you.

Don't rush to fill silence: It's OK to let your candidates sit quietly before they answer a question. It can give them time to formulate their thoughts, and it can also result in them revealing more than they initially intended.

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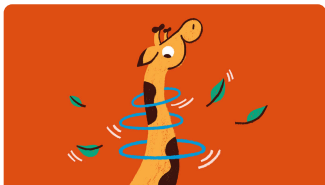
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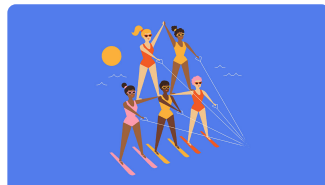
After running a support team for years, Mat joined the marketing team at Help Scout, where we make excellent customer service achievable for companies of all sizes. Connect with him on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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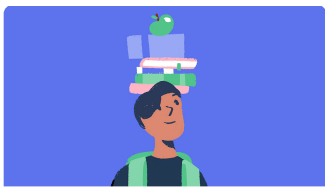
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