

A CUSTOMER SERVICE GEM FOR YOU

This one simple rule can have an unexpectedly high ROI.

By Elnian Gilbert and Gauri Thergaonkar

At Zingerman's we're big fans of clear expectation and simple, teachable and trackable tools. We find that they are invaluable no matter who we share them with — tenured employees, newbies, skeptics, enthusiasts, introverts, extroverts.

If we give our staff clear performance expectations and simple tools with which to meet those expectations, everyone wins. Including the business!

Perhaps our favorite among these tools is the 10-4 Rule.

It's a powerful customer service tool. It's easy to implement; it's effective whether you're in your peak season or in the doldrums, and it's useful whether you're trying to boost sales or boost your customer service.

Clients who have come to our Art of Giving Great Service seminar often make it the very first customer service change they implement. Here it is.



The 10-4 Rule: Any time we're within 10 feet of someone we make solid eye contact and smile, and when we're within 4 feet, we greet them verbally.

10-4 Applies on the Way In

When anyone comes within 10 feet of us, we make eye contact and smile; at 4 feet, we verbally greet them.

When used well, the 10-4 Rule helps create a positive welcoming environment, the kind of space where the best people want to work, shop or be!

What is Zingerman's/ZingTrain?



Since its founding as a small corner delicatessen in March 1982, Zingerman's has grown into a community of 10 unique businesses with over 700 employees and 60 million dollars in annual revenue.

In its vision for the year 2020, the Zingerman's Community of Businesses will grow to become 12 to 18 businesses, all in the Ann Arbor, Michigan, area. Significant and steady growth has consistently been accompanied by national recognition, not only for exceptional products and customer service, but also for a unique business model.

ZingTrain was founded in 1994 to share Zingerman's unique and uniquely successful approach to business. It offers two-day seminars and four-hour workshops at training facilities in Ann Arbor and by traveling all across the country teaching organizations from all walks of life on topics such as customer service, leadership, visioning, open book and training/business systems.

10-4 Applies on the Way Out

This aspect is easy to forget — even when you have a ton of experience in customer service.

If we make eye contact and acknowledge folks as they are leaving, they leave feeling like we care about them. And if we don't, we might miss our last chance to learn from their experience.

Over the years, we've had hundreds of "moments of truth" simply because a staff member was able to identify a problem and take last-minute action before we lost that customer for life.

10-4 Goes Through Glass

This means that that customer who is standing outside, waiting for you to unlock the door, appreciates eye contact, a smile and the acknowledgment that you know they are there. And if you look outside and make eye contact and smile at someone walking by? You might just lure them inside!

10-4 Has No Limits

We're pretty certain there is no quota that applies to happy, heartfelt greetings.

This might seem counterintuitive — if your colleague is working with a customer, will you be stepping on their toes if you end up in a conversation with their customer? Perhaps it's best to avoid eye contact entirely?



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MANAGEMENT

As you already know, we disagree! Well meaning as our intentions might be when we avoid eye contact, we end up making someone feel invisible and miss valuable connections.

It's a much more welcoming place when everyone is making eye contact and offering a friendly "hello!" Sure, it adds up to a lot of greetings, but it's the polite, and profitable, thing to do.

Let's take it a step further. What if you're an accountant and on the sales floor to do a product count? Or a manager on your way to a meeting? Or on your lunch break? What if you just don't have time or are not sure you will be able to answer the customer's questions? Then engaging a customer hardly feels like good service, right?

We'd like to suggest that it is! When we use 10-4 anyway, customers know we care about what they need — and they'll get the answer, whether it's from you or a coworker.

10-4 Has No Limits, Part Two

If your stores have walls and corners, like ours do, you might not be able to see customers all the time. When you garden centers need stocking and prep, your primary focus at any given moment might be a task, rather than a customer.

We'd like to suggest that the 10-4 rule still applies. In fact, we'd like to suggest that you actively keep a 360-degree perspective.

Banish those blind spots. Take off the blinders. Do your side work in places where customers can

easily see you and you can easily see them. Go seeking as many customers as you can to subject to your cheery 10-4.

10-4 Works With More Than "Just" Your Customers

Your paying customers certainly appreciate 10-4, and so will your coworkers, your vendors, the person who delivers your lunch, your mail carrier and the list goes on. Using 10-4 lavishly makes a huge difference to the overall energy of a business, and sets a positive engaged tone for the customer. It creates great relationships to boot.

Why Do We Love the 10-4 Rule So Much?

- It's clear. It's simple. It's easy to teach. And it's easy to remember and reinforce. While using the 10-4 Rule may come naturally to some extroverted folks, for people who are more shy or introverted, it's an incredibly powerful tool that sets them up for success, every time.
- It sets the tone. It sets the tone for our customers. And it sets the tone for our employees and clearly communicates to them what kind of business we want to be. We teach the rule to every employee. It's a behavioral performance expectation and we reinforce it as often as we need to.
- It helps us avoid the unintentional blind spot. You know that horrible situation where everyone assumes that someone else is

taking care of a customer, but in truth no one is? Using the 10-4 Rule radically drops the chances that this occurs.

- And finally, the biggest reason we like the 10-4 Rule so much? Because it works!

We hope that when you read this, you will be inspired to implement the 10-4 Rule. You can start using it yourself almost instantaneously. We just about guarantee immediate positive results — in fact, pause right now and give it a whirl.

We do hope, however, that you will also choose to implement it at the business level. After all, it's elegantly simple, eminently teachable and entirely free. And when you do, we have three requests:

1. Please go to <http://zcob.me/104rule> to download a fun (and free!) printable poster of the 10-4 Rule.
2. If you get stuck, please reach out to us at zingtrain@zingermans.com. We've done this at our 10 businesses and for hundreds of clients and we can help you implement it too.
3. If it works, and we're certain it will, please let us know what difference it made in your garden center. **LGR**

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