

# The manager as matchmaker: Finding the best fit between employee and customer

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Matchmaking managers can improve customer relations and increase repeat business by pairing employees and customers with similar personalities, according to a report in the latest edition of the *Journal of Service Research*.

The study by three German researchers suggests that managers use role-playing exercises, videotaped rehearsals and on-site evaluations to better determine the service experience from the customer's perspective. Then match the right employees with the right customers, report marketing professors Jan Wieseke, of Ruhr-University of Bochum, Anja Geigenmüller, of Ilmenau University of Technology, and Florian Kraus, of the University of Mannheim.

Central to improving service is fostering an empathic relationship between employees and customers. The researchers found a direct link between employee empathy, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The more empathic an employee is toward a customer, the happier the customer will be, and the more likely he or she will be to come back.

To successfully match make, the researchers suggest managers undertake "interaction routing," or pairing customers and employees based on their [personalities](#).

The professors recognized one firm, eLoyalty, for its Integrated Contact Solutions business, which optimizes customer experience by directing each caller to the employee who best matches the caller's psychological

profile. "The firm employs several linguists, behavioral scientists, and statisticians to elaborate communication patterns and algorithms to predict customer interaction behavior," Wieseke said.

But there are other, less complex and less expensive measures businesses can take.

Simple surveys can be used to prompt customers to reveal their personality types. Wieseke, Geigenmüller and Kraus also recommended educating employees about the impact of personality traits and providing routes to respond effectively to certain customer characteristics. They emphasized the importance of training employees to respond appropriately both verbally and non-verbally in a service setting, which can certainly make or break a customer's experience.

"The authors' results show that this eHarmony-like matching of employees and customers is a very effective tactic," said Katherine Lemon, editor of the *Journal of Service Research* and Accenture Professor of Marketing at Boston College. "Empathic customers are much more likely to forgive a spilt coffee or undercooked steak, and empathic [employees](#) are much more likely to respond sensitively to customer requests and complaints. This then mitigates the negative effects of customer dissatisfaction on customer loyalty."

Provided by Boston College

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