

Client-Oriented Service in Russia – How Do Expatriates Regard It?

By [Tatiana Klimanova](#)

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Tatiana Klimanova

Head of Business Development, Outsourcing Division
BDO Russia

If you think of client-oriented services, what first comes to mind? If you were born in the Soviet Union era, you undoubtedly will recall a long anticipation to get service at some cafe or restaurant, or maybe a cashier in the train ticket office whose stone-cold face convinced you better than words that getting replies to your questions here is utterly your own worry. If you are asking among 20-something white-collar and fashionable-tie managers working in a Western company, then they would speak to you at a constant high pitch that the foremost marketing strategy of this company is to listen to the client and meet and exceed expectations — no less.

But what would expatriates coming to modern Russia say about it? Do they really get the quality they expect?

At first glance it seems obvious that Russia has chosen Western ideals of business and copied all distinctive marks of a foreign company. Still, expatriates find that in real life service happens to be not up to declared standards. Something is lacking. It is like you hear on the phone, "Good day, can I help you?" — said so frigidly that you feel they will never smile at you.

So how come we so heartily believe that we are client-oriented but still often do not match with the business model we try to copy so meticulously? The reason is that we still do not know what exactly it means to be client-oriented. Some try to use the "client approach" motto as a marketing tool, others refer to polls asking clients about what they expect, and some feel that making profit has ultimate priority to just adhering to the demand of clients.

Any of these approaches would still not guarantee success. Management might think that service rules do the trick, while the company's front desk could regard them as a waste

of paper that they are printed on.

The answer is that there is no standard recipe for ideal client-oriented service. If we want expatriates to believe that the service level will be high we should not just look west. It's more of a cultural thing than a business decision. Managers as well as entry-level employees have to learn to be helpful not only by the rules of a company, but by the nature of communication. And ideally it should be a level of communication that they would expect themselves to give as a person to a person — as if they would be smiling at themselves when they talk.

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