



The Career Hacker's Guide To

Customer Success Careers

What's your first reaction when a friend calls you with a problem? Are you the person who listens intently, empathizes, and helps them come up with a solution?











What about when you're out in public—are you the life-of-the-party social butterfly who gets energized being around and connecting with other people? Or maybe you fancy yourself a teacher—someone who likes troubleshooting and coaching others through an issue to help them learn.

Well, if either of those sounds familiar, customer success might be a great career path for you. Of course, those aren't the only traits that make for great customer service. At its core, customer success is about building



relationships with people and helping them enjoy a better experience. If that resonates with you, read on.

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So . . . what is customer success, anyway?

If you enjoy helping people, solving problems, and working in a team environment, then customer success may be just the place for you to launch your career.

You might be wondering, “What in the world is customer success? Isn’t that just fancy startup lingo for customer service?”

Maybe. But a key difference that makes customer success one of the most interesting places to launch a career is it’s focused on proactively helping customers enjoy a better experience with a business.

It’s about helping people—and solving problems before they even arise.

If you’re like me, the first time you heard the phrase “customer success,” maybe your imagination conjured up an image of a big

call center room filled with cubicles and people wearing headsets. But this image is wrong.

Sure, call centers still exist. But today’s customer support organization looks a lot different than it did decades ago. In today’s best places to work, customer-facing roles utilize the latest technologies to deliver a better experience for their customers. This is especially the case for early stage startups and fast-growing companies.

A key difference is that customer service in companies like this is proactive instead of reactive. And service teams are responsible for one of the most important aspects of any thriving business: customer relationships.

Career paths in customer success

If you search a jobs board, you'll probably find customer success by a lot of different names.

You'll find a range of job titles like Customer Success Representative, Customer Service Representative, Customer Support, Customer Care, Customer Advocate...

...and the list goes on.

But behind all these different job titles, one thing remains consistent: customer service is in the business of fostering relationships—both with customers and team members.

And if you're just starting out your career or feel uncertain about where to start, this resource page is all about why customer success provides an exceptional jumping-off point for any career and how to get hired in a customer success role.

So let's take a look at some of the common career paths in customer success, ranging from popular first customer service jobs all the way to the c-suite.

Positions

Entry-Level Position	Customer Success Manager	Customer Success Director	Customer Success VP	Customer Success C-Suite
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Common Roles

Customer service Customer success Customer care Customer support	←	←	Customer success Customer relations Customer retention Customer experience Customer outcomes	Chief Customer Officer Chief Operating Officer Chief Services Officer Chief Experience Officer
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Title Variations

Representative Associate Agent Coordinator Specialist	Specialist Manager Lead Senior Supervisor	Director Head of Lead	Head of Lead VP of SVP of	—
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Average Years of Experience

0-3+	3-7+	5-10+	10+	10-20+
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Average Income

\$22k-\$53k Mean: \$38k	\$46k-\$106k Mean: \$67k	\$56k-\$143k Mean: \$94k	\$98k-\$201k Mean: \$147k	\$83k-\$244k Mean: \$173k
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How much money can you make?

If you've checked out average entry-level pay for customer success roles, you might be thinking to yourself, *Why on earth would I want to do that?* Sure, some positions at some companies really don't start out making bank.

But if you look closely at the income potential over time, you might notice customer success offers both a quick and significant earning trajectory.

One note on compensation in

customer success: many organizations offer a combination of base salary and commission or bonuses for upselling/retaining.

In other words, don't always take the estimated income at face value, because many organizations offer additional chances to earn based on performance.

Here's a breakdown of some of the most common income ranges by experience level, courtesy of Payscale:

Average Income

Entry	Manager	Director	VP	C-Suite
\$22k-\$53k Mean: \$38k	\$46k-\$106k Mean: \$67k	\$56k-\$143k Mean: \$94k	\$98k-\$201k Mean: \$147k	\$83k-\$244k Mean: \$173k

See more details on the Payscale reports for [entry](#), [manager](#), [director](#), [vice president](#), and [C-suite](#) customer success salaries.

How to get started in customer success

If you've made it this far, then you might be thinking to yourself, *Sure, all this information is great. But how would I even get started?*

Well, that's a great question.

First, a great exercise might be to take an inventory of the different skills and experiences you have to-date. If you look closely enough, chances are you might find a number of different life experiences that already translate and map well onto the profile of what makes a great entry-level customer success candidate.

In fact, our team has even done our homework on what makes a great customer success candidate by working with hundreds of different companies and hiring managers across the United

States. Some of the common themes we've noticed included soft descriptions like self-starter, high emotional intelligence, and a caregiver's mentality.

Sure, those might sound great in theory, but what do those types of traits look like in application?

Here are some example experiences that are often overlooked by candidates—and we think these types of experiences offer excellent context for a role in customer success.

- Working in the food services industry—like waiting tables, bartending, the drive-thru at Chick-Fil-A
- Working in hospitality—like at a hotel, resort, or in catering
- A background in teaching,

especially in high school or elementary

- Working in a hospital as a caregiver, or in any kind of direct-to-patient relationship (even as an assistant or office manager in a health clinic)
- Any type of experience where you regularly had to answer phone calls and speak to strangers
- Any kind of sales experience (especially door-to-door, even if it was something as small as doing a fundraiser for your summer baseball or softball team)
- Working as a bank teller
- Any kind of experience working in retail
- Working in tech support (like at an Apple retail store, or AT&T, or Best Buy's Geek Squad)

That's not a comprehensive list—nor are there perfect correlations

between those roles and what makes a great customer success candidate. But if you're wondering how to get started, ask yourself, "Do I have any kind of prior experience where I've been able to offer service to other people?"

If the answer is yes, then start by thinking about the framing of your experience. How can you tell a good story about what you learned through that customer service experience, and how it might apply to serving the customers of a business you're interested in?

If the answer is no, well, that's okay, too—no one starts with experience.

So, how can you manufacture some experience—and fast?

The best way to do that, in my opinion, is by actually getting in front of people and helping them solve their problems. Maybe offer to go volunteer at a local nursing home or hospital. Go find a gro-

cery store that needs some part-time help. Document the process of helping your grandparents use new technology. Or go pick up some part-time shifts at a local restaurant. These should be somewhat reasonable options.

But even if you can't score one of those, here are some other options I'd recommend:

Choose a handful of companies you admire, then go research customer reviews online. Take note of what customers are saying—both what they like and don't like.

Demo those companies' products—and try to put yourself in the shoes of their potential customers. Ask yourself, how might this be better?

Go buy stuff, or at least practice “shopping”. Visit a local mall or restaurant. Take note of the way staff interact with you and with

other customers. What did they do that made you feel welcome? What did they do that you didn't like? Think hard about those kinds of things.

Go reach out to someone on LinkedIn who has a title like “Customer Success” or to the manager at a store where you had a good experience. Offer to buy them coffee in exchange for fifteen minutes of their time answering a few questions about a day in the life of their role.

After you've done one or several of those things, go write up a short blog post series about some of the things you learned—and publish it. These are all just some suggestions to help you get the wheels turning.

The important thing to think about is how you can prove to a hiring manager that you can deliver amazing service to their customers.

And whether you have legitimate industry or on-the-job experience or not, focus on creating a story around the real-world experiences you do have.

If you're still feeling uncertain about where to start, well, we created this resource page just for you. So read on to find out more about why customer success provides an exceptional jumping-off point for any career and how to get hired in a customer success role.

“ Customer success is a low-risk path with massive career upside.

Unlike many career paths, customer success leans into developing a broad (vs. only highly-specialized) skillset. This dynamic role touches almost every department and impacts the business in a critical way by overseeing the experience of its customers. In that sense, a role in customer success offers broad exposure to all the ins and outs of a business, its products and services, its industry, and most importantly, the people who make up its customer base.

The customer success career skillset

Because customer success is a highly-interactive role, skills like empathy, attentiveness, patience, and emotional intelligence are all extremely valuable. When customers call, they want to reach a human—and someone who can help them solve their problems—fast.

So customer success offers a really good jumping-off point to develop a wide variety of soft and hard skills. Let's dive in on the next page.



- Communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Hospitableness
- Critical thinking
- Personability
- General software proficiency (tech-savvy)
- Task management and familiarity with task-management software
- Knowledge of the customer journey
- Knowledge of the company's billing, payments, and refund policies
- Product and industry knowledge
- CRM (Customer Relationship Management) familiarity
- Email proficiency
- Microsoft Excel and/or Google Sheets
- Familiarity with calendar-management software
- Familiarity with support ticketing software
- Familiarity with customer feedback software
- Written and verbal communication
- Time and calendar management
- Conflict resolution
- The ability to problem-solve without complete information
- The ability to offer technical support
- The ability to sell (especially up-sell)

The customer success toolkit

To dive deeper into what that a career in customer success looks like in tangible terms, we've highlighted some of the most popular softwares and tools customer

success teams at startups use to manage customer relationships on a day-to-day basis. Click any tool to see it on the web.

Ticketing & help desk



Payment processing



Task management



Miscellaneous



Relationship management



Resources for learning more about a career in customer success

If you're looking to level-up or just get started in customer success, then good news: we've done our best to compile a collection of resources to help point you in the right direction.

[Podcasts](#) • [Books](#) • [Leaders](#)

There are so many great books, blogs, thought leaders, and even several good online communities that are worth checking out. Below, we've outlined some of our personal favorites, as well as some of the best resources from around the web.

PS: If you're looking to connect directly with others in the customer success world, here's a short list of online customer success communities you might enjoy:

- [OUTCOMES by Success Hacker](#)
- [r/Customer Success on Reddit](#)
- [Quora: Customer Success](#)
- [Saastr Community](#)

Additionally, MockQuestions highlights a collection of [mock questions for customer service-related job interviews](#).

Brandy Dryzmkowski wrote [how to succeed in customer success with great tips on mapping skills/traits to real-world customer success work](#).

The best customer success podcasts to start your career

Okay, okay, so not all of the podcasts we listed below are directly customer-success focused. We also included several podcasts we think are really useful for learning more about the startup and technology landscape at

large—understanding the market can be helpful if you land a job in customer success in tech. Also, some of these offer really good insights about how to build a better business, and delighting customers is a huge part of that.

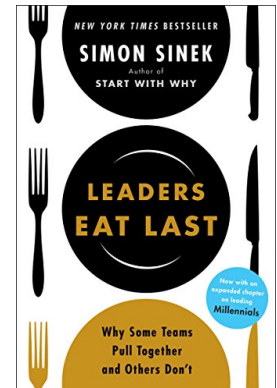
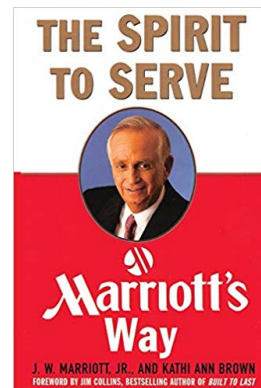
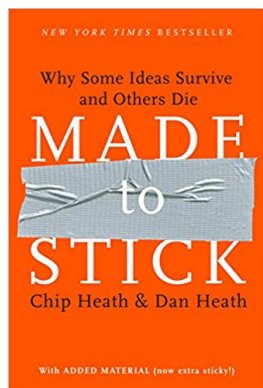
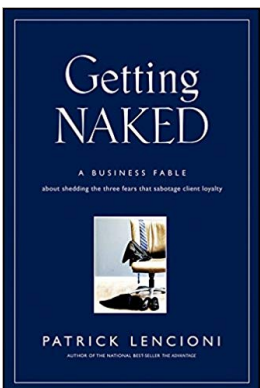
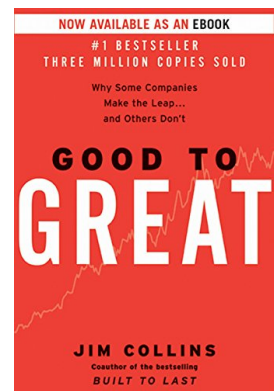
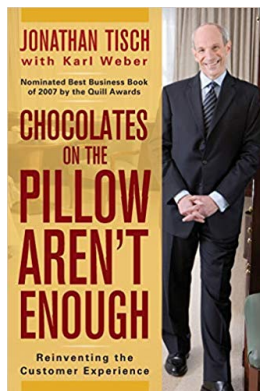
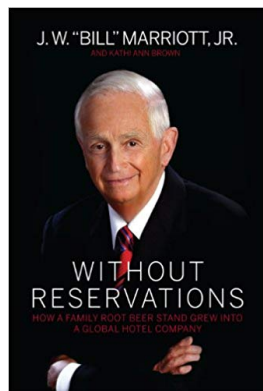
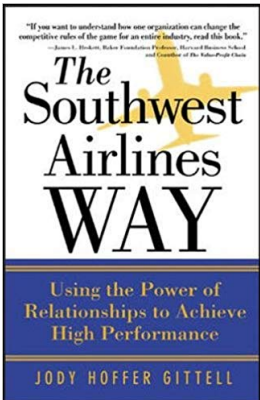
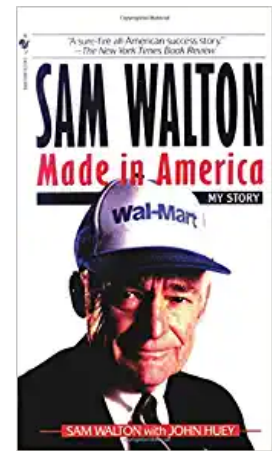
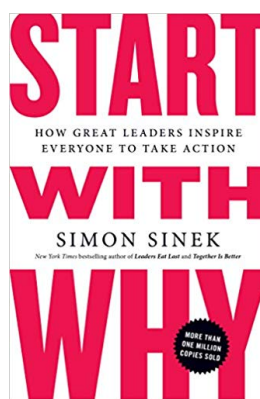
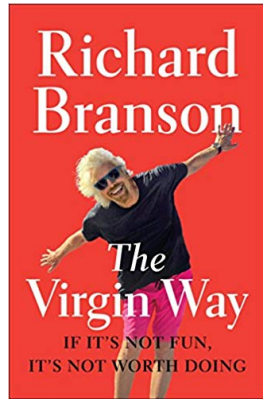
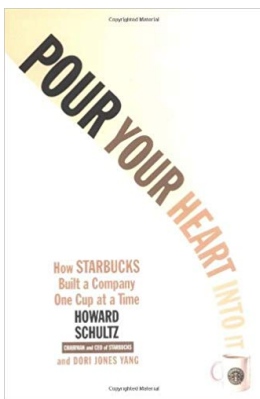
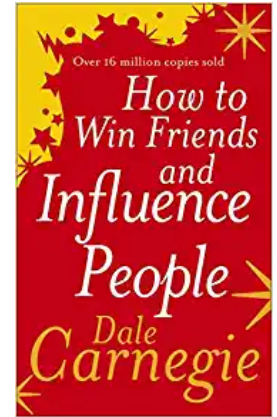
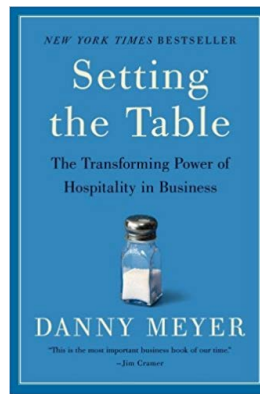
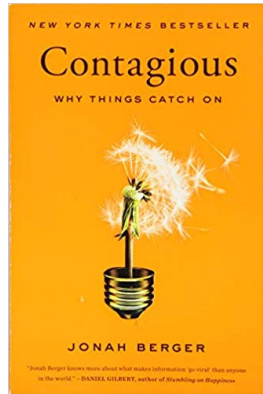
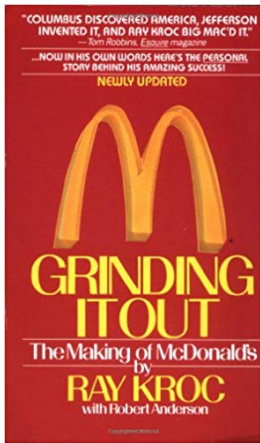


The best customer success books to start your career

Maybe better than any other career category, customer success is a fantastic genre for reading—and don't worry, they're not all stuffy business books, either. The best ones demonstrate this through stories.

So a lot of our list of some of the best reads in the customer success category are made up of awesome biographies and memoirs from people who've built organizations with legendary customer satisfaction.

Click any book to open a preview online.



The best customer success leaders to follow as you start your career

Not every phenomenal voice on how to do customer service well necessarily has “customer success” in their title—which is a great reminder that customer success is a job shared by everyone in an organization.

To highlight some people we think do it best, we've put together this short list of thought leaders, ranging from companies

and investors to customer success leaders, CEOs, and more. Each bring unique points of view to the table—often with great insights that apply to doing customer service better.

Know someone who should be on this list? Tweet their name and why you like them to us @HackingCareers, and we just might add them.



Jason Lemkin



Dushka Zapata



David Skok



Todd Eby



Tomasz Tunguz



Mark Kilens



Stewart Butterfield



Patrick Campbell



Sahil Lavingia



Jason Fried



Justin Jackson



Julie Devaney Hogan



Mike Volpe



Nick Mehta



Wade Foster



Seth Godin

The best companies to work full-time in customer success

In today's world, you don't have to look very far to notice the popular trend of companies loudly posting on social media and all over their websites about how they're "customer first" organizations. But if everybody

is saying it, what does it actually mean? Well, instead of telling, we thought it might be helpful to show—by highlighting a few companies we think do customer success well.



Someone will always make you feel seen and heard within about a minute of walking into a store. You get to play with their products and someone's always nearby to answer a question, talk about why something is great, or get you what you need as fast as they can—while making you feel welcome for as long as you want to hang out.



Notion is a profitable tech startup in SF. They're building a unique sort of product, and their no-shoe-wearing office culture is reminiscent of the founders' days rebuilding the entire product from scratch in Japan. Working on their [Community & Support](#) team could be a remarkable experience.



ProfitWell is tackling a tough problem. Not only have they created a product that works, but they've made it beautiful and easy to use. Plus, through their product, content, and support, they're great at educating their customers on how to do business better.



Anytime Slack's app goes down, they consistently respond proactively—their "downtime" refund emails are a great way of enforcing and proving they value the customer experience.



We're big fans of Typeform here. Help them “make things a little more human” by pitching them on a Customer Support Advocate role—remote, or in San Francisco or Barcelona!



Zapier's brand and offering is all about making it easier for people to work better—one of the small but awesome ways they've built customer service into their offering is using automatic notifications to alert you any time there's a real (or suspected) issue with a Zap. Their fully remote team is incredibly diverse and committed to the company.



The founder of Zappos once described it as a “customer service company that happens to sell shoes.” They prove their focus on customers in so many ways—one small example is their 365-day + free-return-shipping refund policy. On the wilder end, they even once ordered a pizza for a customer who called their support line. You can't escape their customer service.

Customer success success stories

So, what does amazing customer service look like in real life and how can you start earning experience even before you're hired?

Well, it turns out great customer service can happen almost anywhere—and it's not as difficult as you might think to prove you've got the right stuff for the job.

To illustrate how customer service is something anyone, at any level, can do, we've compiled some of our favorite roundups of awesome customer service stories from around the web, as well as real-world stories about how to win a job in customer success with zero experience.

[7 Inspirational Customer Service Stories](#)

From the Customers That Stick blog comes a roundup of ordinary people offering extraordinary service.

[5 Customer Service Stories to Cheer You Up](#)

LiveChat, a company that builds customer success software, featured a collection of great examples of how several companies went above and beyond to delight their customers.

[The Best Customer Service Stories of 2018](#)

Each year, Stella Connect—a maker of customer engagement software—curates some of the best customer service stories from around the web. This one features ten great examples.

How Hunter Won His Job in Customer Success Without Relevant Experience

This is a great story of an eighteen-year-old who got noticed by the founders of a startup with his creativity—and ultimately hired, even though he didn't meet the traditional qualifications of the posting.

Final resources

Congrats on making it this far!

Subscribe to the Daily Job Hunt newsletter. Join 200,000+ readers and get a kick in the inbox every morning.

Read the Career Hackers Manifesto: The core principles of discovering and doing what makes you come alive.

THE DAILY JOB HUNT

 **careerhackers**
manifesto

And check out the other career-hacking guides in this series:

