Good customer service is a dance of multi-tasking, says the general manager of one of the area’s most popular fast-food restaurants. “You need to listen closely to the customer, accurately take their order, handle the transaction, be aware of food that’s cooked and ready, be aware of new customers coming in, be aware of your fellow co-workers — and do it all with patience and a smile,” says Manny Robles, 32, general manager of Wendy’s on North Wenatchee Avenue.

“Not everyone is cut out for this kind of service,” he said. “In busy times, it can get pretty intense.”

Robles said customer service is a high priority for the 35-employee restaurant in an industry that often prizes speed and efficiency over customer contact and satisfaction. “We try to do it differently, to make sure the customer is happy,” he said. “That’s the best way to make sure they come back again and again.”

The 12-year-old restaurant conducts more than 1,000 transactions a day, Robles estimated, serving a total of about 3,000 customers on an average work day. On a recent visit to the fast-food outlet, Wendy’s workers welcomed arriving customers with a friendly “hello,” replaced a customer’s cooling french fries with piping hot ones and strolled the dining room to ask if customers needed additional condiments or drink refills. No customer waited in line for more than a minute or two.

“Hot, fresh food and service with a smile,” Robles added. “Those are our goals.”

Twelve years ago, Robles began work at Wendy’s as a sandwich maker. Four years later, he had worked his way up to manager and has been in charge of the restaurant since 2004. He’s in the process now, he said, of becoming co-owner with longtime owner Terry Sheppard.

The secret to good customer service, said Robles, is that it begins when a job applicant walks in the door. “That’s the first big step.”

Robles’ tips for good customer service include:

- **Hiring** — Keep a lookout for the outgoing “people person” that will make a great front-counter or retail sales worker. Those are rare. A nice smile, good eye contact and a positive attitude are the signals to watch for. Also, make sure an applicant’s appearance is within your business’ standards. For Wenatchee’s Wendy’s, that means no visible piercings or tattoos, no facial hair other than a moustache, a neat and tidy presentation at all times.
- **Reminders** — Throughout every day, restaurant managers suggest ways that workers can improve their customer service. “We’re not heavy-handed about this,” said Robles. “But we pay attention to worker-customer interactions and make suggestions for improvements if we can.”

Said Robles, “Good customer service begins from the top, from the owner and manager, and filters down to every worker in the restaurant,” Robles said. “It’s a type of culture that a restaurant either has or doesn’t have.”

Robles smiled. “We have it, and we try hard to maintain it.”