



Enterprising Rural Families™

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TIP OF THE MONTH:

As nearly everyone knows, a manager has practically nothing to do except: to decide what is to be done; to tell somebody to do it; to listen to reasons why it should not be done, why it should be done by someone else, or why it should be done in a different way; to follow-up to see if the thing has been done; to discover that it has not; to inquire why; to listen to excuses from the person who should have done it: to follow up again to see if the thing has been done, only to discover that it has been done incorrectly; to point out how it should have been done; to conclude that as long as it has been done, it may as well be left where it is; to wonder if it is not time to get rid of a person who cannot do a thing right; to reflect that he or she probably has a family, and that certainly any successor would be just as bad, maybe worse; to consider how much simpler and better the thing would have been done if one had done it oneself in the first place; to reflect sadly that one could have done it right in 20 minutes, and, as things turned out, one had to spend two days to find out why it had taken three weeks for somebody to do it wrong.

-Anonymous

(Source: *Ag Help Wanted*)

The Lasting Effects of Poor Customer Service (Part 2): Recovering from Customer Service Slip-ups

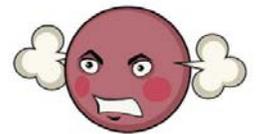
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Several months ago, I hosted an educational event for a local leadership group. The event lasted all day and lunch was provided for the participants. I had called a local pizza chain the day before the event and arranged to have several pizzas delivered to the room where the group would be eating lunch. Unfortunately, the other event organizer was ill that day and I was unable to leave the room to meet the delivery person at the appointed time.

By the time the morning session wrapped up and I was able to slip out into the hall, it was ten minutes past the time I had asked for the pizzas to be delivered. When I found the delivery woman I could tell that she was not happy about the delay and I felt genuinely guilty for keeping her waiting. I was about to apologize when she started fuming at me, "I've been wandering around for 10 minutes trying to find someone so that I could deliver these pizzas! You weren't there and I've been all over this building trying to find you. I had to ask everyone and no one knew where you were!"

I was so shocked by this that I could do no more than mumble an apology. Matters did not improve when I asked if I could be billed for the food and bring a check by the store later that afternoon. I tried to explain that I needed a second signature on the check and that due to my sick colleague I would have to run to another woman's office as soon as the class was over to get the signature. The delivery woman frowned and then snapped, "Well it's not our policy but I guess I will have to let you. Just have the check there by the time we close!"

I was totally floored by the whole exchange and more than a little angered. That afternoon when I took the check to the restaurant, I asked to speak to the manager. The manager was not in and the girl at the counter was not at all helpful or sympathetic. After telling her what had happened and asking her to pass my concerns on to the manager, she looked at me blankly and asked, "Is that all?" No apology, no empathy, just more attitude. That was the final straw. I informed her that they would not receive any more business from me and that I would be sure to let others know of the poor service I had received.



I know that I had left the delivery woman waiting and I felt guilty for that lapse. At least, I did until she started snapping at me! I might have been able to shrug the whole thing off if the problem had not been compounded by the apathetic employee that I encountered later that afternoon. Research shows that at least 50% of customers who have had a bad experience will not let a business know about it either because they think it is not worth their time or they do not feel it will make a difference.¹ After my experience, I can definitely sympathize with the survey respondents. So what could this business have done differently?

We all know that people make mistakes and service *faux pas* happen more often than we would like to admit. A smart, customer service-oriented business recognizes this fact and has a plan in place to help it successfully bounce back from blunders and gaffes. When a mistake is made, you need to work quickly to recover respect, confidence, or faith that may have been lost by your actions. A smart business also recognizes that mistakes, and the process that they have put in place to make the customer whole, can serve as a valuable learning opportunity. Complaints can often be a great source of information, innovation, and inspiration. You can learn from customers and possibly improve your business.² Following are some practices that you can incorporate into your very own bounce-back plan.

Own the mistake and apologize.

In a customer service blunder, the customer's perception is the one that matters. If a customer feels that he has been wronged, then it is up to you to fix it, not spend time trying to place blame. Life is not fair and so neither are some of the situations that you will find yourself in with your customers. Your customer service exists only in your customer's perception³.

So the first thing to do when a mistake has been made is to own the responsibility and apologize for it. An apology goes a long way to smooth over a tough situation with an aggrieved customer. Some businesses are resistant to giving out apologies because they do not want to make themselves look bad by admitting to a mistake. The problem with this line of thinking is that in the customer's mind, you already blew it. Denials and excuses just make them angrier; as does a long, drawn out affair of trying to figure out if a mistake really was made or who was really to blame for it. Who cares? Even if the customer is wrong, it really comes down to fixing the customer's problem and making them feel valued and important.⁴ Customers do not want excuses, long-winded reasons, or hard-luck stories. They want solutions.



Fix the problem.

This second step is most often confused for the first step in a bounce-back plan. Do not fall into the trap of assuming that you know what is the solution to the problem. Your job is to listen carefully to the customer so that you can fully comprehend her problem and all of the circumstances of the problem. What you think might be the problem at first glance is usually different than what it becomes once the customer has fully explained.⁵

¹Leland, Karen and Bailey, Keith. *Customer Service for Dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2006. Print.

²Leland, Karen and Bailey, Keith. *Customer Service for Dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2006. Print.

³Leland, Karen and Bailey, Keith. *Customer Service for Dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2006. Print.

⁴Smart Company Growth Blog. (2011, January 27) How to Recover When you Drop the Customer Service Ball. Retrieved from <http://smartcompanygrowth.com/biz-dev>.

⁵Leland, Karen and Bailey, Keith. *Customer Service for Dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2006. Print.

The Customer's Six Basic (And Unspoken) Needs

To satisfy customers, the old advice of customer service experts was to give them what they ask for. But to excel with your customers, you must also meet the following unspoken needs.

- ▶ *Friendliness*
- ▶ *Understanding and empathy*
- ▶ *Fairness*
- ▶ *Control*
- ▶ *Options and alternatives*
- ▶ *Accurate information*

Sometimes, the solution to a customer's problem is simple - replacing a product, giving a refund, *et cetera*. More often than not, a mistake cannot be easily repaired. When this happens you should work with customers on a mutually acceptable solution to their problem. By asking the customer for their opinion, you empower them and move them from adversary to partner. You will also give them a pleasant surprise because it is not often that a business asks for their ideas. Soliciting the customer for solutions is a good idea for two reasons; one, making them a part of the solution takes the edge off of their Complaints, and two, they may come up with solutions that you would not have thought of and that are less painful for your bottom line.⁶

Follow up and give the customer a care token.

After you have fixed a customer's problem, you can go the extra mile for the customer by following up to ensure that their problem was resolved to their satisfaction. This follow-up should be done by phone or e-mail to ensure that the customer's issue is completely resolved and no further action is required. You can also let them know how or in what way their issue or complaint has contributed to the way you do business.⁷ By demonstrating a sincere interest in problem resolution you impress the customer and boost your business' credibility.

You can also give the customer a care token. This is a way of showing the customer that you regret the mistake, that it will not happen again, and that you care about their business.⁸ The token does not have to be big or expensive, but it does have to tangibly show that you are sorry. Gift certificates, free products, or even a simple letter of apology are all good ways to show your repentance.

Actively solicit feedback from customers.

Not just part of the bounce-back plan, businesses should be actively seeking feedback from customers every chance they get. Nothing that you can do is more important for the success of your business than taking care of your customers and making sure all of their needs are met. By soliciting feedback, you and your employees are building long-term, rewarding, and profitable relationships that will benefit everyone involved.⁹ Use active listening and really try to understand what the customer is telling you so that they know you will act on the problem. Ask probing questions so that you can get more detail and ideas. Customers feel valued when they have been heard and when their ideas/suggestions/comments are put into action.

There are many different methods for obtaining customer feedback. The best method is also the easiest, a face-to-face conversation with your customer. These conversations can be challenging, especially when a complaint is involved, but they will give you the richest information because you have the chance to

⁶Smart Company Growth Blog. (2011, January 27) How to Recover When you Drop the Customer Service Ball. Retrieved from <http://smartcompanygrowth.com/biz-dev>.

⁷Leland, Karen and Bailey, Keith. *Customer Service for Dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2006. Print.

⁸Leland, Karen and Bailey, Keith. *Customer Service for Dummies*. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, Inc. 2006. Print.

⁹Bell, Chip and Zemke, Ron. *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*. New York: AMACOM, 1992. Print.

ask those probing questions. There is also the tried-and-true method of comment cards. Some customers are uncomfortable with the idea of a confrontation or an embarrassing conversation so this is a quick and easy way for the customer to give you an idea of how you are doing. You could also consider forming a customer advisory panel from some of your long-term customers. Of course these are people that you have a relationship with and that value you, but they also have a fair understanding of your customer service operations.¹⁰ If the questions you ask are crafted to get honest and unbiased answers, then you will find this group has a wealth of knowledge to mine.

One last note about soliciting feedback, it is a truth universally acknowledged that you should listen to your customers whether they are complaining or praising you to the skies. Perhaps less acknowledged, but no less important, is the silent customer or the customer who grits her teeth and says “Fine.”¹¹ As I mentioned above, research shows that 50% of your customers who have a problem or an issue will not speak up because they do not think it will make a difference. So when someone says nothing or “Fine,” perk up your ears and start asking questions.

Next time a mistake happens in your business, remember these practices and realize that recovery is possible. Maybe if that local pizza restaurant had applied them, I would be a loyal customer even now. In the meantime, I will be buying all of my pizza from their competitor.

¹⁰Bell, Chip and Zemke, Ron. *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*. New York: AMACOM, 1992. Print.

¹¹Blanchard, Ken and Bowles, Sheldon. *Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1993. Print.

Tips for Recovering from Customer Service Slip-ups



Empathy with the consumer: Empathy with the consumer anger is important in handling **consumer complaints**. Management can gain empathy from consumers by providing more time to listen to **their complaints**.

Speed of responding: Speed is crucial in handling **consumer complaints**. When consumers make a complaint and do not get proper treatment/response, it is likely consumers will not be satisfied and not satisfied means transferring to another company.

The balance of responses: The company can respond to **consumer complaints** in these ways: Ignoring. Giving compensation and improving the quality of the product/management to the expected level of customer satisfaction. Thereby, maintaining a customer's loyalty.

Ease of contacting the company is important: In the era of globalization, communication is an absolute requirement. By opening a line of communication with the consumer, easily, would be very beneficial for companies to create goodwill in the eyes of consumers.

