

The Secret to Delivering World-Class Service

Introduction

Think back to a bad experience you had with a product or service. Did you complain to the provider? If you are like most people, you probably didn't. Only one out of twenty-five dissatisfied customers will express dissatisfaction. But, I would be willing to bet that you told several people about your bad experience. Studies show that on average, dissatisfied customers will tell 12 others. With the web, this number could be in the thousands. As a provider of products or services, it's unnerving to think that 91% of dissatisfied customers will never purchase goods or services from us again. Given the damage caused by a single negative customer experience, it would seem that we should work very diligently to insure that our customers have positive experiences, and most importantly continue their loyalty to our products and services. How? Well, the answer is simple, it's just not easy...deliver world class service to every single customer, all the time. The tough part is in the execution. That's what we'll discuss in this article.

Free to Decide...at Every Moment...

The first step in implementing a monumental positive shift in your customer service reputation is to realize that we are all free to choose our responses in any given situation. We can choose to respond in a way that helps or we can choose to respond in a way that hinders. But, we are all free to choose. It is in that choice that we begin to plot the course for the interaction at hand. Let me give you an example, I recently returned from a trip to find that the door handle on my car had been broken while it was parked in a private lot near the airport. The manager of the lot took a look at the handle, verified that it was broken, and asked me to call back the next morning to discuss with the owner. I spent the next morning getting myself mentally psyched up for the call, anticipating any one of a myriad of outcomes, from the owner never getting on the phone to a shouting match regarding who actually broke the handle. To my surprise, the owner answered the call, and asked me to explain. I explained the situation and waited for his response. Now, just think for a second of some of the possible responses that the owner could have had to my complaint. He could have said that I couldn't prove that it was broken by them, or he could have said that I signed a waiver (which I did) releasing them from any such claims of damage or he simply could have said that there was nothing that he could do about it.

The Least Painful Solution is Not Always the Best

But, much to my surprise, he told me that he had verified with his manager that the handle was indeed broken, and that he would be willing to *make it right*. His response caught me off guard, to say the least. While I was formulating my response, he suggested that I have the damaged handle repaired and fax the receipt to him. He gave me his fax number, and the call ended. About 4 days later, I called him and told him that I would be faxing the repair receipt. He asked the total of the receipt and said, "Fine...I will send you out a check." He verified my address, and about 3 days later a check showed up for the full amount of the repair.

Obviously, this business owner understood the principles of customer service and satisfaction. He probably realized that prompt effort to resolve a dissatisfied customer's issue will result in about 85% of them returning as repeat customers. He chose to think long-term and put up with a little short-term pain in order to produce lasting, positive results. His choice was a good one. I will continue to park at his lot, and since the incident have probably told six or seven others about my positive experience. Was it worth the couple hundred bucks to the owner? Of course it was! The problem is that too few of us think long-term about customers.

Long-Term Thinking at the Core

What is the lifetime value of a customer? Thinking long term requires us to understand the benefits of repeat customer business and the overall value of every interaction that our customers have with our organization. It's not about the profit on a single transaction, but rather about the value of that customer relationship. Going back to my experience, the owner took a loss on my transaction. But, he was thinking about the long-term value that I bring to his business as a repeat customer. In addition, he probably knew that I would tell my business associates, who also need a place to park when they travel, about his lot and the outstanding service that I received. The long-term profitability far outweighed the short-term loss...as is the case in most customer interactions. But, not all customer dissatisfaction is created equal.

Customers Are Not Always Right...But They Are Always People

Of course, we all know that old saying that the customer is always right. Well, that's just not true. There are some customers out there that will work hard to get something for nothing or complain about experiences because they think they will get preferential treatment. It's a small percentage, but they are out there. A better way to handle any case of customer dissatisfaction is to think of the customer as a person. On the other end of the phone or email or chat, there is a living, breathing person, with fears and dreams and problems just like you. Just stop and think of approaching every customer contact as contact with another person and not contact with an inanimate object, in this case a generic "customer". If you do that, you will have no problem handling even the most surly or unreasonable customer.

The Sound of My Name is My Favorite Sound

During every customer call you should remember to address the customer using their name. Nothing makes a call more personable than knowing who you are speaking with. And don't ask the name as part of a rehearsed speech at the outset of the call..."Hello this is Andrea Smith from XYZ Company, can I get your name please?" Start by announcing who you are, then ask how you can help. Then ask for a name. Like this..."Hello this is Andrea Smith from XYZ Company. How can I help you today?" The caller speaks. Then you say..."Thank you...I can help you with that. To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?"

Approach Every Conflict with an Open Heart

It might sound kind of sappy, and maybe even impossible in a hard-edged business environment, but people can really tell when your approach is friendly or combative...no matter what you say. It's really the way you say it that counts. And, if you can approach each call with an open heart and compassion, that will come across to the customer, and the experience will be that much better.

Summary

So, providing world-class service is a matter of living the mission of serving the customer. Remember, the mission of every organization should be to add value. The world doesn't need more products and services, but the world always needs more products and services that add value. Think long-term and adopt the customer service mission throughout your organization. And approach every customer interaction with an open heart, and I can guarantee that you will be in that small class of companies that earns the respect and loyalty of their customers.

We hope that you have found our advice practical and useful. We are always interested in your feedback and are here to help you along in your journey. Our number one goal is to help you grow your book of business. We'd love to hear from you, anytime! Please contact Bill Kossack at ClearData at (724) 387-1713 or request more information via email to: bkossack@cleardataint.com. Or visit us at www.myRelEvent.com