

HEROES TAKE CARE OF CUSTOMERS EVEN IF THEY'RE WRONG

By John Madden

It has been said, and I was taught it as a young teenager in my aunt's small hotel in Dublin, Ireland, that the customer is always right.

While trying hard to accept this philosophy (With my aunt, it was a dogma!), I can still recall incidents that, in my mind, totally disproved this theory.

And yet, as I advanced in the world of business, I soon learned that the best way to lose customers to the competition was to make sure that they knew when they were wrong... and put them in their place! Can *you* be sure that some of your customers haven't gone to your competition because of an "I can prove you wrong" attitude on the part of one or more of your people? Employees follow examples and generally do what they're trained to do.

One day I called the customer service "800" number of my long distance telephone provider.

I believed that I had not received the appropriate "volume discount" on my last telephone bill and I told the customer service representative that I would like a credit on my next month's bill. She was quick as a flash to assure me that I had indeed received the correct discount. I went over the numbers with her, disputing the long distance total she mentioned. It was a lesser number than I had calculated, which explained the smaller discount I had received.

She informed me that the discount was only applicable to domestic calls,

and that if I would just look at my bill, I would see that three of my calls were made to London, and therefore I was not entitled to this discount. She appeared to derive some sardonic satisfaction from showing me that she was right, and I was wrong.

Has this sort of thing ever happened to you as a customer? Has it happened to you as a customer service worker? When this happened to me, it was painfully obvious that although I was technically wrong, this employee was not trained - nor inclined - to let me off the hook and help me save face.

Exceptional employees will go beyond that, especially when we acknowledge their efforts and accomplishments and encourage them to strive for excellence!

The question is, are *you* (or is someone) teaching your employees the skills they need to provide outstanding service to your customers? Are you teaching them how to *respond* to "situations" instead of *reacting* to them? You'll be doing your customers and your employees a great service if you are!

Here are some guidelines you can follow to keep your customers coming back, especially if they were "wrong":

1. When answering the phone, smile immediately; it makes the customer (or any caller) feel at ease and comfortable, and *you'll* feel better and more helpful to the caller.
2. Listen until the customer has finished, especially if he or she appears upset.

3. Don't take it personally. To the customer you *are* the company!
4. Empathize. See the problem or concern from the customer's point of view.
5. Apologize, even if you're not at fault. The fact is, customers will often understand it's their mistake, but why rub it in? Tell them the small print was probably not clear, and that you're sorry for the confusion.
6. Ask the customer if there's anything else you could help with.
7. Thank the customer for calling. By calling, she gave you an opportunity to
show off your outstanding customer service under adverse conditions!
Tell
the customer you appreciate her business and that you hope to continue to take care of her in the future.
8. Record the customer's concern or problem, and see if your company needs
to make any refinements to a process which affects customer service
9. Follow up with a brief thank-you note, and you've probably won a customer
for life!

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