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CD	21.13	(-0.08)
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Everyone Has Problems...Do You Have Problem Solvers? - By Rob Rush

Can I speak to a manager? - The six most dreaded words in any customer service scenario, a phrase loosely translated in customer-service speak to 'kiss this customer goodbye.'

Once these words pass a customer's lips, chances for recovery are virtually nil. Even a manager with the diplomacy of Jack Kennedy, the negotiating skills of Jack Welch and the charm of Jack Nicholson would most likely be facing a future customer relationship worth jack....squat. The ensuing conversation is less resuscitation, more post mortem.

"So how did this customer relationship die, Doctor?"

"They asked to speak to the manager. By then, it was too late."

Forgive me my runaway metaphor for the moment, and let's focus on the pertinent issues at hand. As a business owner, operator, supervisor or manager, how do we avoid reaching that point of no return? The answer is surprisingly easy. Make sure that every person who serves a drink, answers a phone, staffs a front desk, records a tee time or takes a deposit is equipped to handle a problem without calling for backup.

Simple, right? Script every scenario that your front-line personnel could possibly encounter. Provide the exact right words and actions for every situation. Plan...and then plan some more. Leave nothing to chance, and every customer-facing employee should be prepared for the worst. Customers, bring it on.

Except...that ain't gonna work.

I'm reminded of my younger brother, who found....creative ways to test his boundaries and my mother's patience when we were growing up. One day he actually came home from school bare-chested. Somehow, somewhere over the course of a day at school, he had literally lost his shirt, which prompted my mother to lament "before you left this morning, should I have told you not to lose your shirt at school today?"

The point - my brother coming home without his shirt was such an absurd proposition, she couldn't have possibly dreamed of warning him of the consequences of arriving home shirtless. Nor could she have conjured up the various permutations of bizarre scenarios in which my brother found himself over the years. ("Should I have told you not to throw the trash can out the window?")

Clearly, no matter how prescient the manager (or the mother, for that matter), it is impossible to anticipate and plan for every problem that your employees may be asked to solve. That doesn't mean, however, that you have to leave it entirely up to them. The foundation of any great service culture is a clearly defined set of standards and practices that speak to a desired, optimal customer experience; the pillars of those standards are the ones that speak to problem resolution and service recovery.

Company Information



LRA Worldwide

LRA Worldwide is a leading consulting and research company that specializes in Customer Experience Management ("CEM"). LRA helps organizations design and deliver exceptional customer experiences across all key touch points using an integrated suite of services that measure and improve service quality, customer satisfaction, employee performance, loyalty and profitability. The company provides research services, designs and writes customer service and operating standard; develops high-level training and workplace learning programs, and implements performance measurement processes including customer and employee satisfaction feedback systems, mystery shopping and quality assurance programs, in process that continually monitors and improves the customer experience. LRA has deep sector expertise in the food service and facilities management, gaming, hospitality and leisure, sports and entertainment, and travel and transportation industries.

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In creating an outstanding service culture, it is imperative that this foundation exist, not to guide your employees in their every move, but to provide them with some fundamental skills, guidance and a "way of doing things" that allows them to make the right decision when it comes to the customer, every time. The process doesn't stop there however; once the foundation is in place, you may find that regardless of the tools you provide, the folks you have on the front-line are ill-equipped to handle them. Enter Human Resources, as identifying, hiring, training and retaining people with the baseline skills to execute and provide that model customer experience becomes of primary importance. Job descriptions need to be rewritten, hiring guidelines changed and training programs revamped. Once all of these elements – standards, the optimal customer experience, human resources and training – are aligned with the customer in mind, then a truly ingrained service culture can take root. Bit by bit the employees feel empowered to handle anything that comes their way...and managers feel innately comfortable letting them do so.

With legions of problem solvers on the front-line handling customer issues based on a clear concept of the optimal customer experience, and a solid foundation of service standards and skills, training, confidence and character, the call to the bullpen for the manager becomes an anomaly.

Naturally, that is the ultimate goal, where phenomenal service and problem resolution occur without a second thought, where "doing the right thing" becomes almost instinctive. Think of service delivery and problem resolution as a golf swing. When do you hit your best shots? If some level of baseline golf skills and athletic ability are present, typically when your mind is clear, you're not thinking about every last detail of your swing and you do what feels right. It's when you start over-analyzing the situation – Did I cock my wrists? Is that against company policy? – that you begin spraying balls all over the course....and the annoyed customer in front of you begins to fidget and turn from scarlet to purple. If the proper fundamentals (and training and people) are in place, doing what "feels right" instinctively is going to get the job done. And that is what empowering your employees (or your swing) is all about.

The best part - as a manager, you won't get called into the fray when the situation is beyond repair, expected to salvage the unsalvageable. Instead, you'll have plenty of time to work on more important matters...like improving your golf swing.

About the Author

Rob Rush is CEO of LRA Worldwide, a leading consulting and research company specializing in Customer Experience Management. You can contact him at rob.rush@lraworldwide.

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