

Don't apologize - just fix it... in a memorable way.

SITUATION: A customer calls to complain. Something is wrong, needs fixing. Or is late.

YOUR INITIAL REACTION: Rats.

REALITY: Fix the problem, and build goodwill, or lose the next order to the competition.

AXIOM: The people who speak with and deal with customers control the future and the destiny of their company.

BASIC INSTINCTS: Your first instinct when speaking to an angry customer is to apologize. "On behalf of --- I would like to sincerely apologize..." is a bunch of insincere crap. Avoid this. It puts you at a deficit, and no one cares or wants to hear it.

Your second instinct is to give an excuse for why it happened. "The truck broke down, no one showed up, we're in our busy season, the shipment arrived after we closed..." No one cares or wants to hear it.

Your third instinct is to blame someone or something else. "That's not my department. We did all we could from this end. Our hands were tied..." No one cares or wants to hear it.

CAUTION: Defensive words, lame excuses, bad attitude, statements like: "You don't have to talk like that," and other negative acts of stupidity, only fuel the fire and anger the customer even further.

BEST ANSWERS: Get empathetic as fast as you can. **START** your response with one of four phrases: 1. Oh, that's horrible, 2. Thank you for telling me that, 3. **NO PROBLEM!**, or 4. You're in luck! These phrases tell the customer you care about her, and they put you on the path to begin to resolve the problem " and that's the **ONLY** reason the customer called.

JUST FIX IT: Make a plan to fix it in one of three ways. 1. Make a suggestion based on your experience followed by the phrase "fair enough?" 2. Ask the customer what she feels is **FAIR**. 3. Tell of a similar experience and a positive outcome and ask if that remedy might also be OK for him.

APPROVE AND RESTATE: Get their approval, RESTATE what they agreed to, and reconfirm their approval. Take notes as you go.

AND NOW “ THE REST OF THE MISSION: Ok mission HALF accomplished. The customer is now *satisfied* that you have resolved their problem. Big deal “ that’s your job. **Now is your opportunity to create a great story.**

OPPORTUNITY: Fix the problem in a memorable way and you begin to earn *loyalty*.

GO BEYOND RESOLUTION: Make another concession or give something unexpected. Make a concession they were not expecting. Make a future concession. Give something extra “ something of value. Something WOW!

BIG SECRET: The secret is "take my side" (the customers) in the resolution process “ not the company side.

OR ELSE: A negative story about you, your company and/or your product will begin an ten year run to anyone who will listen. What is the cost of a negative story? Plenty. What’s the worth of a positive story? What does it cost to create a positive story? Less than the cost to fix it memorably “ less than the cost of prevention.

VALUE MEASURED: The cost of giving away something is MUCH smaller than losing the customer, his future business and the story he’ll tell all his friends, and what the friends may do.

SMALL WORLD: The world is real small “ industry markets are even smaller. Industry leaders talk to other industry leaders. Customers talk to other potential customers. Employees talk to other employees.

THE REAL WORD: The word (of mouth) about how you conduct your business will help you or haunt you as you market (advertise) your way down the path. It will promote your goodwill or seal your fate “ and it’s all done behind your back.

NO BUDGET?: We live in a world of budgets but I challenge every reader that there are hidden costs that exceed every budget ever made “ the cost of lost business and lost goodwill. The cost of a negative story and the ripple effect it has on future business. The cost of poor training and the impact on your business caused by negative word of mouth advertising.

WRONG MESSENGER: Where is the budget for building customer goodwill? Where is the budget for customer retention? Where is the budget for earning

referrals? Lost somewhere in an advertising agencies need (greed} for billing and the fee (kickback) for "placing" an ad. *(authors note: I am NOT against advertising and advertising agencies " they play a vital role in building image and branding products " BUT there is a severe lack of funds put towards KEEPING customers, and one of the main reasons for it is that ad agencies don't profit from it.)*

Back to the point " screw ups " and the cost of fixing them.

WIN THE PRIZE: The key to success is to empower people with friendly answers to resolve problems, and give them the (financial) latitude to go beyond resolution " to relationship strengthening. Why not create a budget for KEEPING customers and spend money creating memorable stories about complaints turned inside'out, and dealt with in an award'winning way?

CHALLENGE: What awards have you won lately?