

Solving Customer Problems

You can't have customers without encountering a problem once in a while. We are all human and mistakes happen, but it's how we respond that makes the difference of keeping or losing a customer. Remember, 64% of customers quit because of an attitude of indifference on the part of some employee.

Let me illustrate with a recent experience. A small package, about 2 pounds was shipped from UPS in Watertown on Monday to Burlington, Vermont. That is normally a next day delivery. On the following Monday morning we receive a call from our client asking if the package was shipped because they had not received it as yet. We called UPS to begin the tracking process. After our dialogue with a computer produced no satisfactory results, we finally spoke to a person. It seems an error was made in Watertown and the package intended for Vermont ended up in Mississippi and was now in Illinois. But "no problem we'll have the package in Vermont by Thursday" 11 days after it was shipped. Since that wasn't acceptable we asked to speak to the supervisor. We informed the supervisor of what had happened and asked him to locate the package and send it to Burlington for delivery next day. "That's impossible" was the reply, "Illinois is a major sorting center and it wasn't our mistake." There was no apology offered, no concern shown and no offer to refund the shipping cost. He just didn't care. The result was that a 20 year business relationship was ended. Now, the loss of our business is not going to effect the revenues for UPS, but this attitude of indifference which seems to permeate the organization will take its toll in the future. The Post Office has taken some of their business with Priority Mail. Who will be next?

How does this story effect your business? It provides us with several lessons of what to do when a customer has a problem.

1. Put a smile in your voice. Attitude is critical in solving customer problems. Your job is to "fix problems, not blame". Keep your attitude positive and your voice smiling.
2. Listen and understand the customer's problem. Make sure you have all the facts and important information.
3. Show that you are concerned that the problem be resolved. Put yourself in the customer's place and understand how you would feel.
4. Accept responsibility. Mistakes are part of being human. When one is made, accept the responsibility and correct the problem. Research has shown that in situations where customers suffer a loss of \$100 or more, they will continue to do business with you 82% of the time if the problem is quickly resolved.
5. Remember the lifetime value of a customer. Keeping a customer is the most important thing any organization can accomplish. The lifetime value of a customer, their family, friends and referrals are our lifeblood. Our job is to solve problems and keep customers.

Be responsible, positive, attentive and cheerful and keep customers for life.