



TOPIC: LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT

TITLE: CUSTOMER SERVICE

Have you ever had a bad service experience? My guess is that you can answer an absolute yes to this question, and have more than one war story to share. Last week, while traveling, I had the opportunity to experience bad service with my hotel. I use the word opportunity - because that is exactly what it was. This experience was an opportunity for this hotel to win my business or lose it for life. It wasn't a bad service experience because a problem occurred; it was how the employees responded that defined bad service for me.

It would be great if everything always went as expected, however, reality tells us that it doesn't always happen. It's how we're treated that truly makes the difference. If handled well, a customer can be very loyal - thrilled, impressed, and a customer for life. If handled poorly, a customer may leave - angry, frustrated and disappointed. In both cases, the customer will share their story with others. In addition, as a manager or leader, your employees are your customers. So, how you handle problems or issues with them, can create the same result as with a customer.

I'd like to dedicate this newsletter to the element of communication in customer service. When dealing with a problem or issue, with a customer or employee, what we say and how we say it can make a world of difference. Although we have good intentions, we may find ourselves responding defensively. In fact, when I look back on my bad service experiences, they all share a common trait. As a customer, I felt the employee was focused on what they couldn't do or why it wasn't their fault, rather than resolving the issue with a solution acceptable to me.

As I continue to reflect on these experiences, there are several words and phrases which are commonly used. So, I'd like to give you an example of what I have experienced, and also offer some alternatives that will create a different result. I'm going to call them the "banned words" of customer service.

It's Our Policy

Employees sometimes explain to the customer the company policy, and then communicate the solution to their problem within that policy. **FACT:** Customers don't care about policies. Although policies often have a purpose, customers want satisfaction and solutions. The same goes for our employees. They don't want to fit within company policy, they want a solution to their issue. Focus on the solutions available which will satisfy the problem or issue, and leave out the policies and procedures.

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No

No one enjoys being told no. Although it is sometimes necessary, focus on the alternatives available. In many instances, we can't do exactly what the customer or our employees would prefer. However, we usually do have alternatives available, and in some cases can offer more than one so that the customer can choose the option that best suits them.

You Should Have

The time to talk about what to do differently is after the problem or issue is resolved, not during. Our customers, or employees, don't want to be told what they should have done - it's too late for that. Instead, they want a solution to the problem at hand. After resolution, then is the time to ask the question, or discuss: What could you do differently next time to prevent the problem from occurring again?

I Can't

This again is one of those phrases often necessary, but not effective. We can't always do what the customer would prefer. We can, however, focus on the problem and offer alternatives and solutions to get it resolved. The real key here is to focus on what you can do, not what you can't. Our customers, and our employees want solutions, not excuses.

You Have To

Our customers and employees don't "have to" do anything. They have choices, and our job is to offer them choices, and help them make the best decision. We can do this through brainstorming, communicating options and alternatives, and guiding them to the best choice for them. Telling them what to do is never effective.

Think about how often you hear these phrases in your daily communication with others.

How often do you hear them as a customer?

How often do you hear them as an employee?

How often do you use them in your communication?

My challenge for you this week is twofold: 1) remove these words and phrases from your vocabulary, and 2) coach your employee/peers in your workgroup to remove these phrases from their communication. If we all focused on communicating from a solution-based perspective, rather than a reactive perspective, our businesses and our lives would be much more pleasant.