



4 BETTER WAYS TO HANDLE COMPLAINTS

If you WOW a customer at the Moment of Truth , the average customer will walk away and tell 5 people about the experience.

If you fail to meet the customer's expectations at the Moment of Truth , customers are very likely to tell 11 people about the problem they had with your company.

If you drop the ball with customers at the Moment of Truth , but rebound with a quick customer recovery, research shows that the customer will tell up to 17 people about your service recovery.

Did you get that? Customers will tell 5 people if you WOW them, BUT if there's a problem and you quickly fix it, they will tell more than 3 times as many people as they would if no problem had occurred at all.

One of the fastest and easiest ways to grow your bottom line is to equip your front line employees with skills to respond to complaints and problems in such a way that they completely regain goodwill and restore the customer's confidence.

Read on to find out exactly how to do this.

1. Resolve problems as quickly as possible. The faster the resolution, the better the chances for maintaining loyalty. TARP, Inc. found that ninety-five percent of complaining customers would remain loyal if their complaint was resolved on the first contact. That number dropped to seventy percent when the complaint was not immediately resolved. In fact, the speed of resolution has a greater impact on future loyalty than the resolution itself. Strive to resolve complaints on the first contact and when that isn't possible, final resolution should occur within 5 - 10 business days in order to maintain and build loyalty.

2. Give Them Something. Coupons, product samples, and other freebies have a definite impact on loyalty after a service failure has occurred. Years ago American Airlines gave me 7000 frequent flyer miles after I experienced a gruesome delay. And that gift of miles, was enough to make me come back. But don't take my word for it: A study conducted for the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals (SOCAP) found that 58% of complaining consumers who received something in the mail following their contact with consumer affairs departments were delighted, versus only 40% of those who did not receive anything. Giving customers token items, such as coupons or product samples, after a service failure both increases the perception of value and serves to maintain loyalty.

3. Only allow the friendliest, most helpful, and diplomatic employees to talk to customers. Employee courtesy and attitude are critical factors in regaining the goodwill of customers who have experienced a problem. Customers contacting a company with a problem want to talk to a person who is courteous, professional sympathetic and understanding. Additionally, employees must be skilled in communicating with diplomacy, expressing empathy, and representing the company credibly and convincingly during times of consumer distress. The attitudes and behaviors of frontline professionals form powerful lasting impressions with customers whether these impressions are positive or negative.

4. Encourage your people to "Be Gumby". You remember Gumby don't you---the green rubbery figure that Eddie Murphy portrayed so hilariously on Saturday Night Live? In my seminars I teach employees to "Be Gumby" when it comes to dealing with customers. By being Gumby, I mean do whatever it takes to service customers. This includes being flexible, bending over backwards, making a 180 degree turn when you were heading another direction on a non customer-impacting task. It might even mean standing on your head. The idea is to be completely customer focused. Being Gumby guarantees you'll always make customers happy.

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