

# Profit from a Customer Service Recovery Program

By John Madden

A client recently said to me: “Most days things seem to run smoothly; but whenever we have a customer complaint we seem to collapse. Where are we going wrong?”

How you handle and solve customer concerns and complaints is a measure of your standing in the ‘excellent’, ‘bad’, or ‘mediocre’ category of customer service. Many companies fit into the ‘mediocre’ (average) category where ‘indifference’ and ‘defensiveness’ best describe their operation.

Are you sure this is not you?

Recently I returned from a business trip and was not pleased to find that two books I’d ordered three weeks before had not yet arrived, despite a promise from the book vendor that they would be delivered in five days. I was naturally upset and called the book vendor’s long-distance number.

While I firmly told the lady who answered the phone how unhappy I was about their failure to deliver, and how this had greatly inconvenienced my schedule, she interrupted me right in the middle with: “Just a minute sir, you’ll have to talk to customer service”

I said: "I'm sorry I thought you worked there"

She said: "I do"

I said: "Oh, I see, but you're not in customer service?"

She said: "That's right"

I said: "Well, I guess you'd better put me through to customer service then"

She said: "They've gone for the day" I detected indifference in her voice.

Not wishing to deny her the opportunity to take charge of the situation, I said:

"What should I do?"

She said: "You'll have to call back tomorrow" (Isn't that special!)

No customer service recovery here. Only indifference and buck-passing, the symptoms of a mediocre company that tolerates less than outstanding customer service. Do you think I still do business with those people?

Certainly not. Not when their competitors are just dying to steal me away!

Not when I have many other options!

Contrast that mediocre service with the response from my Internet service provider, Netvision, in Wichita, Kansas. Some time ago, during their changeover of equipment, I was unable to access the Internet or my e-mail at the

weekend for over an hour, which was very unusual. When I eventually called

the office on Monday to complain, the lady in charge, Melody, was most

apologetic, explained about the equipment change, told me what she was going to do, got back to me in fifteen minutes (as she promised) with an update, and when all was fixed, she gave me her home number in case this ever happened at the week-end again. Wow!

And the *piece de resistance*... on my next bill the monthly charge was waived!

So, what was the difference here? The first company didn't have a *customer service recovery* program or policy, even though they probably *think* they have - and their brochures and publicity tell us they're the best! The second company *walked the talk*, knew why they were in business, knew that the customer has many choices, and they had a system for *customer service recovery*.

How can *you* profit from a customer service recovery program?

- Make a list of things that could, and do, go wrong; show how they should be handled, and how to prevent them from recurring.
- Give your people the tools to do the job ...training, authority to take a decision, adequate equipment and materials, and information.
- At staff meetings, get employees' input on what improvements you could make to procedures that affect their ability to perform.
- Show appreciation and acknowledgment of the efforts and commitment of your people, especially when they handle difficult

situations.

- Call some of your customers who've had a problem and ask them how your company scored in service recovery!

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