

Mopping up

When something goes wrong with a customer, don't fret. Just fix it. **By Pamela Schuck**

It's happened. Something has gone wrong with one of your customer's experiences with your business and now you must practice customer recovery.

Customer recovery is returning an upset customer to a state of satisfaction after a service or product breakdown has occurred. Why is it important?

■ **Economic and marketing value.** Studies show it is less expensive to keep the customers you have than to find new ones. Unhappy customers will tell everyone about their service issues and it will affect your ability to attract and retain new customers.

■ **Customer loyalty.** When a customer feels you have resolved a problem, you have used the opportunity to develop a stronger customer relationship and proven their business is valuable.

■ **Identification of organizational problems.** You may never know what kind of problems exist unless a customer cares enough to complain and gives you the opportunity to make it right. Worry about customer complaints you don't hear about.

So what do your customers expect after a problem?

■ **A sincere apology.** That doesn't mean you have to always admit you were wrong. Customers are not always right, but they are always your customers. They deserve

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an apology that shows respect and empathy for their situation.

Start the recovery process with, "I am sorry you have experienced a problem with our service. We will work with you to resolve this problem."

■ **To have problems resolved fairly and effectively.** You must listen actively, ask questions, gather information and repeat the information to make sure you understood what your customer is telling you. It is your responsibility to help customers explain their problems, not the customers' responsibility to "prove" they didn't do anything wrong.

Assume customer innocence. If you find the customer has caused the problem, it is your job to educate him or her.

■ **Treatment that shows the company cares** about the problem and about helping to resolve it. Smile, empathize and promise to solve the problem. Customers are the only reason you are in business.

■ **Compensation equivalent to the burden** the customer has endured. All too often, business owners fail to acknowledge how much the inconvenience has cost the customer. Ask what you need to do to make it right. You may be surprised in finding customers very reasonable in their expected compensation.

■ **Deliver what was promised** rather than something that falls short. Follow up with customers to confirm everything was resolved to their satisfaction.

Customers who have problems and concerns want to be communicated with. Your focus should be on open, ongoing communication in the recovery process.

Good customer recovery programs restore brand loyalty, confidence and repurchase intention of customer who experience service problems with a company.

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