

Creative Customer Service - How Far Will You Go to Wow a Customer?

by Mary Sandro

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A large part of customer service success is creating a seamless experience. Customer needs are anticipated; systems are in place; employees are trained. The company runs like a well-oiled machine. But what happens when the unexpected happens? Customers have an “unusual” request or they simply don’t know the rules of the system? The unexpected, I suggest, provides the opportunity to stretch the system, improve the system, or even forget the system and Wow a customer.

I arrived late at a hotel in Cambridge, MA the night before an 8 am training, dressed for the cold weather in brown boots and heavy trousers. When I got to my room I unpacked my lovely, gray suit only to discover that I had left my black heels at home. I looked down at my feet and had to admit the brown boots were not even an option.

I went to the concierge for help. It was after 10 pm. Nothing was open. All of the shops in the area opened at 9 am, no help again. I was desperate. I pressed the concierge, “There’s nothing that can be done?” Silence. I put on my best pathetic gaze and repeated, “Nothing...?”

The concierge contemplated further then asked, “What size are you?” Full of hope I blurted out my shoe size for all to hear. The concierge stepped out from behind the desk, pointed to the black heels on her feet and asked, “Will these work?” I could have kissed her. She gave me the shoes right off of her feet!

After conducting a program in Fort Smith, AR I wanted to have a nice dinner. The hotel there recommended an Italian restaurant, but neglected to mention that they take reservations only. I arrived early at the restaurant, about 5:30 pm, and requested a table for one, non-smoking.

The first question in response was, “Reservation?” I said, “No.” The second question was, “Do you have a date joining you?” I said, “Don’t rub it in.” The gentleman behind the desk was well humored and friendly and explained the reservation situation. I confessed I didn’t know and was from out of state.

He attempted to accommodate me in the schedule. The non-smoking section was full so he asked one of his servers about the smoking habits of the guests in the smoking section, “What about the Jones’?” The server said, “They smoke like chimneys. She wouldn’t be comfortable there.” “What about the Smith’s?” “They’re chain smokers too.”

The gentleman disappeared for a few minutes and upon returning produced a table for one in the non-smoking section. I was reading the menu when a server seated a table of five. They started to pull out cigarettes. I gasped quietly. The server quickly reappeared and said, “I’m sorry. This is the non-smoking section. Follow me.” This happened two more times with different servers. The gentleman had rearranged the entire floor plan of the restaurant to accommodate me!

For companies with excellent systems in place, the next frontier in customer service is Wow,

handling the unexpected creatively. I have observed that companies and professionals practicing creative customer service successfully have two things in common.

The first commonality is that they care. Management cares. Employees care. Everyone cares a great deal about people. They like to help people solve problems. In fact, not helping people would be like kicking a puppy. The concierge at the hotel cared about my shoe predicament and personally decided to go above and beyond. How much does your company care? How much do you care?

The second commonality is that employees have authority. Even when people care, if their hands are tied they can't help. In addition, employees who aren't especially "caring" might be motivated to be creative for customers simply because it feels good to exercise their authority. The gentleman managing the restaurant that night cared and had the authority to accommodate a guest who didn't know the reservation rules. Do you have enough authority to be creative?

With all of the advances in technology, doing a good job isn't good enough to separate from the pack. The prize will go to the one creating new frontiers. How far will you go to Wow a customer?

About the Author

Mary Sandro helps companies and professionals achieve results through effective presentations exceptional customer service and innovative hiring techniques. She is available to speak on these topics. For more information visit <http://www.ProEdgeSkills.com> or call 800-731-0601.

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