

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction – Recording Studio	pg.2
2. Perceived Value	pg.4
3. Competition is Healthy	pg.6
4. Never take you eye off the ball	pg.8
5. Studio Conclusion	pg.9
6. Good Customer Service	pg.10
7. Respond Rapidly to Customer Contacts	pg.11
8. Don't make promises you can't keep	pg.12
9. Listen to your customers	pg.13
10. Deal with complaints	pg.13
11. Throw in something extra	pg.16
12. Analysis	pg.17
13. Employees	pg.17
14. Training	pg.21
15. Conflict	pg.23
16. Reprise	pg.29
17. Referrals	pg.29
18. Moments of Truth	pg.33
19. Sound Practices	pg.34
20. Conclusion	pg.39

Introduction ...Recording Studios:

There's a sucker born every minute, or so PT Barnum was misquoted as saying. To paraphrase what Barnum actually said is; "Men, women and children do not survive on gravity alone, in their lighter and gayer moods, they need to be entertained ...those of us who do so are working within the plans of the author of our nature". (*You can find the literal quote in "Struggles and Triumphs" by PT Barnum 1st edition publish date 1853*)

Barnum's pontification is a powerful statement for anyone who is in "show- bez", for the correct reasons. The right reason to be here is the audience, the end user, the ultimate customer of anyone in the entertainment business. It is the person standing outside your metaphoric tent waiting to buy a ticket to go inside and see the show. They are the reason we are here for without them we would not exist.

As a recording studio owner/operator you serve a customer who is building a product to deliver to an audience. The greatest challenge of customer service in this type of subjective service event is in keeping your eye on what is important. What's important is the customer. Typically the customer is the mechanism or person responsible for paying the invoices you submit but they may not necessarily be the one who you need to please. In the studio business it is common for a customer to designate an outside individual to represent their investment. That person then becomes the face of the customer and should not be treated any differently than you would the person who holds the purse strings. This client designated person becomes, for all intent and purposes, the client unless you are directed otherwise by their supervisor. Therein sets the reason why you should know your customers hierarchy of fiscal responsibility.

The biggest challenge for creative people is the understanding, on a fundamental level, of exactly who they are using their talent to craft for. We are in the business of delivering to the client an aural product laced with subjective qualities, which should be guided and judged by the customer or their representative, who may or may not know the best way to achieve the job you do day in and day out. Our challenge as service providers is to produce a product representing the desires of the person charged with directing the session for the customer. For better or for worse we are tasked with following directions. Some people are better at the art of directing than others. The best of directors will spot and exploit the skills of the talent they are working with to the betterment of the project. This is more the exception than the rule which follows a path akin to Lombard Street in San Francisco as it twists and turns its way through our subjective world of supposition.

Here's an old studio proverb that applies:

"We the willing, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have been doing so much for so long with so little that we are now capable of doing anything with nothing at all."

A trade school in the Seattle area took out an ad showing a recording engineer working at his desk. The picture was shot from below the console arm pad looking up at a stalwart engineer staring into the indefinite with both hands on the mixing desk while diligently at work. The ad copy read: 'Earn More... Work Less'. Needless to say, this bit of unintended humor ended up hung on the walls of many a lounge in Seattle area

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

recording studios. Humor has been well defined as “truth with a little curly cue on the end”. In reality, this ad was not humorous at all for it missed the mark of truth by light years in distance. The hard reality is that the average annual earning for a recording engineer in the Seattle / Tacoma area is the same as it was for a Los Angeles area recording engineer 40 years earlier. Please re-read the last sentence and reflect. Have you been an adult fulfilling your social and financial obligations over the past four decades? If you have met these responsibilities over the past ten years, yet alone forty years, you certainly understand the gravity of that statistic. So, the question then becomes; why is it this way and how do we correct these inadequacies? Let’s explore this.

Perceived Value:

Cicero wrote in 44 BC: "...vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual labor, not for artistic skill; for in their case the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery.

Cicero must have been a record producer. All too often the perceived value of a person’s service differs greatly from the person providing the service to the one contracting it. Recording studio operations is a slippery slope in this regard as it applies to customer service. Often when booking studio time the customer’s desire is only in contracting the manual labor side of studio functions feeling that the artistic aspect is not a critical component of audio equipment operations. This is a potential area of conflict which is discussed in Conflict Resolution under “Don’t take it personally”. The customer’s perceived value of your business will equate to whom you choose to align

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

your business with. The majority of the answer to the question of who your peer group is will be established by the amount of skill and financial commitment you bring to the table.

If you are a home studio operating a modest system built on the constraints of a lesser budget you would not have “time in the saddle” with the more exotic equipment which requires the better part of the defense budget for a small nation to purchase and keep updated. Not by any intellectual process but by merely the process of budgetary constraints you do not possess the same level of skills as someone who operates the exotics daily. Don’t take it personally but your time is not worth as much as the other person who has a higher skill set due to experience, access, assets and exposure. In the eyes of the customer your perceived value is less. You will need to adjust your expectations of your worth or, bring more skill and financial commitment to the game of competition. If there is no game in your town maybe it is your expectation of access, assets and exposure that are out of whack. In the world of professional audio; just because you build it does not mean they will come. There is a long list of extremely successful rock and roll artists who have opened their own studios. The list of those open for more than five years is considerably shorter.

In the Employees section you’ll read and re-read where happy employees equal happy customers. It follows reason that happy customers bring in new customers who drive up revenue which allows the small studio owner to purchase the exotic equipment of their desires, giving them the time in the saddle operating and understanding the exotics which ups their skill set and perceived value in the customer’s eye. The minute you value you as *just a workman of vulgar means of livelihood performing mere manual*

labor as a pledge of slavery to your hearts desired job, you lose. You not only lose your client but your sense of self-worth and any possibly of growth in the future.

Competition is healthy:

“Without adversarial conditions you would only have compliancy.”

Deepak Chopra

“There's no reason to think competition has to be adversarial.”

Jay Leno

“Competition is not only the basis of protection to the consumer, but is the incentive to progress.”

Herbert Hoover

“Do your work with your whole heart and you will succeed - there's so little competition.”

Elbert Hubbard

Knowing your worth through market research and a firm understanding of the business' you're in competition with for your clients dollar will help guide you in “going the extra step” for your customer. If everything seems equal between you and a competitor yet the competitor has a larger market share than you do, all would not be as it appears to you as it does to their clients who should be yours. Do your research and find out what they are offering that you should be.

When competition just becomes a war of rates as opposed to one of service and skills, the business who wins that war is the one with the biggest savings account. On the surface the customer would appear to be the receiver of the spoils from such a war but really they suffer too. Let's face it, if you have to do what you normally do for lesser than you normally receive, can you honestly say that you will perform at 100% of your normal

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

capacity 100% of the time? No you can't if your half way honest. In this, the customer loses.

In a rate war the local area economy suffers as well. Customers come to globally expect an hourly rate that is less than practical to meet the fiscal requirements of any given business. ...well I have to book my studio at \$25 an hour because XYZ Studios down the block is. This competitive tactic only creates a sense of distress among business owners who should be collectively working towards a common goal of driving more business into an area by improved product and services at a universally standard and agreed upon competitive rate. Instead of lowering their hourly rate business' competing against each other would be better served by raising their level of customer service in attempts to drive business in their direction. In this the customer wins as does the area which feeds the local economy in its wake.

As an independent sprint kart racer my father stood as Grand National Champion among factory race teams who worked really hard and spent a lot of money to just keep up with him on race day. In an 1966 interview with Hot Rod magazine my dad was asked if he was troubled by the large rise in factory race teams entering the sport, he commented; *"...heck no, it inspires me to work harder, it helps me to come up with new ideas for winning next week"*. There is a shining example of healthy competition. It is the act of thinking about new ways to satisfy your customer's needs while protecting the solvency of your business. My dad didn't spend his time studying ways to cheat a victory from his competitors, he spent his time studying ways to out engineer them.

Never take your eye off the ball:

Appearing on a regular basis in the human experience is the not so obvious unbalanced reality of; it's simple to keep your focus but not at all easy. Day to day studio operations coupled to life in general goes by at such a rapid pace that when you do make time to reflect on your business' growth and customer satisfaction rate it can be like to trying to "find Waldo" in the popular children's book series 'Where's Waldo'. The information you gather, if you gather customer and contact information at all, becomes a plethora of images and colors with Waldo (the information you seek) hiding against a sea of visual stimulation. What was it you were trying to do with your business in the first place? Are you meeting the bench marks you envisioned when you started your business? What does your business plan say? Oh you don't have a business plan? That's a bad idea.

Call me old fashioned but when I travel in unfamiliar territory I carry paper maps of the area I'm traveling through. I also use the latest in technology showing me digital 3D images with bright colors, arrows and a friendly voice directing me to someplace that I know is not the right place because the paper maps say so. A well-defined business plan will help a business keep its focus in the torrent sea of day to day decisions required to keep your enterprise on course. If you are providing a service for trade you are in business and need to focus your attention toward the ideals you established early on and are building your business around. If you are not interested in trade for your skills and assets you still need to understand the topographic landscape of the market you are affecting.

If in your business plan it states that you will provide a high level of customer service coupled to a reasonable cost for the product you offer in your area; doesn't it then stand

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

to reason that you would spend some time researching the business' you are in competition with? In order to fulfill the mandate set forth in the brief business plan example above would require that a pre-planned amount of resources / time be devoted to the initial research and annual updating of the market information for your area. It needs to become instinctive to ask your customers; "... so how did you hear about us?" That is a really simple task. What's not easy is logging the information for retrieval at a later time. It may not be easy or fun but it is essential for successful business growth. The information gathered can then be set against your business 'projected values to see if you are meeting the mile posts set forth in your business plan. It is the lens you focus the health of your business through.

Studio Conclusion

This is a collection of ideas and understandings from leading experts in the field of Business and Customer Service. Its relevance is applicable to both small businesses and larger corporations. The common denominator for both is the people and their personas that come into your business.

Good customer service ...

...is about sending your customers away happy; happy enough to pass along positive feedback about your business to others, who may in turn try your product or service for themselves becoming repeat customers as well. It's the world's best and oldest form of marketing. The modern sleek term for it is Viral Marketing or at its very most fundamental level you can call it by its classic name, "Word of Mouth Advertising". It simply exists when you perform your job well and the customer leaves your business with a positive customer experience giving your company relevance in your customer's eyes and everyone else who views your customer, who speaks well of you, as an authority.

A successful customer service program will convert your customers into clients. Customers come and go but a client has established a relationship with you. A customer service program designed and performed properly, consistently, morphs into an exercise in maintaining good client relationships for your business.

The term "customer service" encompasses a variety of techniques used by businesses to ensure the satisfaction of a customer. Your program will be delivered by you or your people. Your staff should be friendly, attentive, trained in customer service and are responsive when confronted with customer complaints. Successful small business owners name this factor as one of the most important pieces of establishing and maintaining a thriving company.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

"A cascade of beneficial effects can result when a small business cultivates customer loyalty,"

"That pattern holds in all kinds of small businesses—those that sell to other businesses as well as those that sell to consumer."

Michael Barrier; Nation's Business

Good salespeople can sell ice-cream to Eskimo's, once. That salesperson's approach to customer service determines whether or not they will ever be able to sell anything to those Eskimo's again. Customer service is about forming rapports with people. It's the practice of forming a relationship with an individual customer so they in turn feel that the experience they had with you is something that he or she would like to continue with in the future and would recommend to their friends.

How do you go about building such a relationship? You do so by remembering society's one true secret:

"You will be judged by what you do, not by what you say."

Providing good customer service is not all that complicated. Below is a general outline to help in building a customer service program. Each business or individual would naturally mold these elements to their own cause.

Respond rapidly to customer contacts:

Do not leave your customers waiting for you to respond to their request for contact. Make sure "someone" is picking up the phone when a potential customer attempts to contact your business. *(Notice the use of "someone". People who call want to talk to a live person. People who contact you through electronic media expect a personal*

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

response, not an auto reply.) Check for messages often and respond to them as quickly as you would like it to have it done for yourself.

Let the customer know early in the relationship that their time matters to you. If they have initiated a contact with your business it is safe to assume they have questions regarding the service or product you have to offer. Doesn't it make sense to answer their questions as quickly as possible?

Who among us likes to be kept "On Hold"? Hold is a void of unanswered questions put into temporary suspension where the word temporary takes on expansive qualities of infinite proportions. Nobody likes Hold. Don't make your customers wait there for longer than is necessary. It doesn't make a good first impression.

Don't make promises you will not or cannot keep:

Reliability is a major component in any well working relationship. Good customer service is no exception. If you say, "Your files will be ready by 5:00 PM", make sure they are delivered by 5:00 PM. Don't offer something you think you can do; only offer up what you know is possible.

Nothing annoys customers like a broken promise. You generally only get one shot at winning a customer over. You went through a lot of effort just to get the customer through your door. Doesn't it then make sense to treat them well once they have chosen to come in and try your service or product? Once they have walked through your door they are 80% yours. One small broken promise and they are in a fast retreat away from you and your business whether you know it or not.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

If you promise a customer you will make an unreasonable delivery request, agreeing with it in hopes of winning your customers favor, you will do more damage to the relationship by not making your promised deadline than you would by being honest with your customer in the first place.

Listen to your customers:

Is there anything more frustrating than telling someone what your expectations are only to discover that the person hasn't been paying attention to you and needs to have you explain it to them again? From a customer's point of view, no there is not. Let your customer talk and pay attention to what they have to say. Take notes if necessary.

Every client is your most important client. That being said, if someone is important in your life don't you generally listen to what they have to say? If you pay genuine attention to what your clients stated desires are, you may just hear what they need from you to achieve them. That is the reason they came to you in the first place. Not just hearing, but listening to what your customer is saying sends a message to your customer that they are more than just a paycheck to you.

Your customers should mean the world to you. The survival of your business depends on them and the impression of you they leave with.

Deal with complaints:

No one likes listening complaints. Most of us have developed an intrinsic reaction to complaints which says, "Oh well, you can't please all of the people all of the time". Even though that statement speaks the honest truth, if you give that one complaint your

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

attention, you just may be able to please this one person this one time. That is good customer service.

Why is it that the smallest complaint from a customer resolved quickly towards the customer's satisfaction causes such a significant positive impact in the relationship between you and your customer? Because it's rare to have it happen and the exception will always win the day over the rule.

Mark Twain wrote: "Wouldn't it be nice if people thought about us as much as we think they do?" It is nice and if you show that level of care to your customers you will quickly convert them into clients.

Here are a few points to consider in dealing with customer complaints:

It's not personal.

- Your customer is most likely conflicted by process and not you. Stress comes in many fashions for numerous unseen reasons. Stress is pressure. In a large enough buildup of pressure the force of pressure can overwhelm its containment vessel. The added pressure of the system, process or whatever you may be associated with in your clients mind may cause a breach of your clients stress containment abilities. You just happened to be in the line of fire when it blew. Don't take it personal.

Any defense is a declaration of war.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

- Give your customer/client time to vent. Do not get defensive and try to quickly reach a resolution before your client has had a chance to speak their mind. To become defensive, ostensibly declaring war on your client, is forgetting to listen to your customer.

"Getting angry is easy ...at the right person, for the right reason, at the right time with the right intensity ... that is not easy."

- Don't take the easy road in dealing with customer complaints. Keep your anger in check when it comes to conflict resolution. Fire Behavior 101 teaches: (Basic level) Fire needs three elements to exist. Fuel / Oxygen / Heat. You have to remove one of those three elements to extinguish the fire. Anger is fuel.

Take the extra step:

- Whatever the extra step may be, if you want to provide good customer service, take it. They may not say it to you, but clients will notice when you make an extra effort. They will tell other people about it, wouldn't you?

Regardless of your source of income, either as an independent business, major corporation or lower level employee, you sell yourself each and every day. The person who signs your paycheck is the customer you wish to convert to a client. Make no

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

mistake; the customer is doing you a favor by utilizing your business or skill set. The opposite has never been true.

It is safe then to say that at any level of trade the one supplying product to the consumer would become irrelevant if there was no call for the product or service the supplier had to offer. Take buggy whips as an example. With an abundance of suppliers competing for your customer's trade doesn't it stand to reason that a supplier of product or service would take a little extra step or measure to thank their customer for choosing their business? Your customers will appreciate the extra attention they received from you and will communicate that sentiment to their peers.

Throw in something extra:

Whether it's additional information on how to use a product or a genuine smile, people love to get more than they thought they were going to get for their money. A "plus-ing" gesture doesn't have to be large to be effective. A post audio engineer that delivers 5 seconds of room tone from the voice over session so the film or video editor has natural quiet sounds to cut in for extra time if needed, that is adding a plus to the job. The editor will be happy to find the 'Room Tone' if needed and will convey that to the director who in turn talks to the producer who makes the decision of who to hire next time. Once again a simple gesture can and most often does return positive dividends.

Analysis:

Providing good customer service is the keystone to your business's success. It should be the crowning achievement of everything your business has built up to. A successful business's Customer Service Program would reside on top of their business model. Quality customer service is not all that hard to figure out from a personal level. Just treat people as they would like to be treated in any business or service you utilize or provide. The irony of good customer service is; over time it will bring in more new customers faster than promotions and price slashing ever did.

Following are specific focuses of thought regarding customer service:

- ✚ Employees
- ✚ Training
- ✚ Sound Practices
- ✚ Conflict Resolution
- ✚ Instilling Customer Loyalty
- ✚ Cutting Ties with Bad Customers

Employees:

"Well done is better than well said."

Benjamin Franklin

The value of a business' Customer Service program is a direct reflection of the quality of the people presenting it. Those people speak volumes about your business to your

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

customers. It tells them how your employees feel about their connection with your business. It is a true image of the relationship between the people and product they represent. A business owner sets the tempo of their operation when choosing an employee. When considering a potential employee an employer must look for someone who can not only properly perform the role in which they are hired for but for a person who will properly represent the business in a positive light to the customer and other employees as well. If an employee feels their job is marginalized, the job the employee is performing will then be done to the standards the employee sets and not to that of the company.

Christopher Tkaczyk, writer for Fortune Magazine, says in an August 2010 article regarding American Express' new approach to customer service:

American Express (AXP) has always prided itself on its customer service; CEO Ken Chenault lists delivering superior service as one of AmEx's top three priorities for 2010 (the other two: growth and efficiency). So last year when it gave its global customer service division a makeover, it decided to focus on making life better for its 26,000 call-center employees. The theory: Happier employees mean happier customers. "We've learned the importance of the attitude of the employee," says Jim Bush, EVP of world service. AmEx started by asking customer service employees what they wanted to see -- and then delivered better pay, flexible schedules, and more career development. It also switched from a directive to keep calls short and transaction-oriented to engaging customers in longer conversations. Collectively, the moves have boosted service margins by 10%. "Great service starts with the people who deliver it," says Chenault. "We want American Express to be the company people recommend to their friends."

The essential component in an outstanding customer service program is a great staff. Large companies are generally weighed down by a small forest of paper in the form of

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

handbooks and guide lines that specify customer service instructions. Independent, smaller businesses have the advantage over larger corporations by hand selecting employees that possess excellent customer service skill sets or personalities.

Employees also need to be extremely familiar with the inventory, services, and policies required for the business. Knowledgeable, personable employees satisfy customers.

Face-to-face employees should not only concentrate on their appearance but on the appearance of the space for the customer interface as well. An unorganized dirty workspace, a sloppy dresser or an employee lacking in personal hygiene can negatively reflect on the company. Every small aspect involved in the customer interface has an effect on the business as a whole. Small details added together combine to make a powerful impact on those enjoying the finer points whether they recognize them or not.

For a quality level of service, as well as for conflict resolution, train staff members by asking them to imagine themselves in the customer's position. When an employee stops to consider their own preferences, they tend to become more empathic towards the customers point of view. Treating a person the way they want to be treated is generally a good method to solving any problem. The end goal for anyone providing customer service is dual in purpose. It is important to keep the customer happy while working toward benefiting the business.

Many reasonable and intelligent people (supervisors & managers) tend to leave behind their ability to interact reasonably and intelligently with other adults (employees) in the work place. These managers treat their employees like irresponsible children. Children who can't be trusted and aren't capable of making intelligent decisions. Just for perspective, these employees are people who have families, mortgages, car payments,

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

and countless other responsibilities. They handle those responsibilities reasonably and intelligently, day in and day out, outside of the work environment. More often than not, lower level employees handle dealing with less far better than their counterpart does in handling more. If these employees are treated as they want to be they will perform at their maximum potential representing your business well both inside and outside of the workplace. Doesn't it just seem obvious to ask adults what they need in order to be more productive and what do they think it would take make their product more competitive in the market place? It gives them ownership in the process. If a business treats their employees as they would like their employees to treat their customers doesn't it stand to reason that it would become second nature for the employee to follow suit?

In the world of face to face presentations, human to human interface, enthusiasm is infectious. That statement holds true from a Girl Scout selling cookies outside a grocery store to a corporate board room where billion dollar deals are made for Boeing aircraft. A person passionate about the product they represent will be more likely to convert their audience than someone who is detached.

Employees are the front line of your customer service system. If you want happy customers for your business you will have to connect them with happy employees. The battle to provide good customer service begins at home or as Socrates is quoted saying:

"The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear".

Training:

Training an employee on the company's customer service expectations is the central component of customer service being delivered by the employee as the program mandates. Businesses should have their customer service guidelines in writing and made undeniable that all employees are expected to be familiar with the program and be trained with the necessary skills to implement it. Customer service training should be required for all employees who interface with clients. Audio editors, for example, regularly interact with customers. These are highly trained industry professionals representing the business they operate to the customer but all too often receive little or no customer service training. The guidelines that undirected employees follow are self-induced, motivated and rarely consistent.

Roberta Maynard in Nation's Business reports, *"More companies are asking their technicians to fill gaps in sales efforts and to repair communication breakdowns. Some companies are cultivating their technicians' abilities to clarify customer needs and identify and capitalize on sales opportunities.... Some managers are giving technicians greater authority to do what it takes to keep customers happy, such as occasionally not charging for a service call or a part."*

Anyone who has enjoyed any moment in a Disney business knows firsthand that Disney is *"The Happiest Place on Earth"*. Just ask anyone who works there; they're the ones who make it happy. The following is from The Disney Institute describing their 'Quality Service' course:

Through Disney's Approach to Quality Service, one of the five core topics taught by Disney Institute, you'll learn ways to instill your team with a sense of pride and passion that is certain to help exceed expectations.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

Quality service is an aspect of business integral to any corporation, and that's because we all share a common trait: every one of us has needs, wants, and emotions. The ability of your employees to anticipate and react to these traits is a major step towards providing quality service.

At Disney, we elevate our own level of service by paying extremely close attention to detail, providing comprehensive training, and treating every Guest as a VIP. Service is second nature for our Cast Members because we enjoy pleasing people -- and we enjoy seeing profits.

We are all human beings hoping for a pleasant day. Training employees to recognize what they can do to fulfill that desire in the customer's life has positive affects reaching beyond profit margins. The better an employee feels about the job they are involved with they better they will feel about themselves as a whole. Their involvement with your business then becomes a Mobius strip with the single end pointed towards happier customers and increased profits.

It is imperative to train all Face-to-Face employees in:

- ✚ Taking ownership of each customer's experience showing them responsiveness and concern
- ✚ Addressing all the customer's needs and concerns as they pertain to your business
- ✚ Conflict Resolution
- ✚ Dual end goals; Going the extra mile for the customer, protecting the business

Human to human interaction is complicated at best. The addition of stress to that interaction in the form of choice, conflict or personalities can and will come in dynamic

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

waves demanding careful, trained attention by the employee representing your business. Careful consideration must be given when choosing an employee for customer interaction and the level of training they receive. Many talented animal trainers can train a cat to sit but there is not one yet that has taught their cat to bark. A business owner looking at an employee's customer interface abilities or lack of would have to ask themselves if they were doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results. Are they waiting for their cat to bark? If the employee is an asset to the company's product but a liability to customer relations it would best serve both the company and employee to find a position for that employee away from the public eye.

When defining your business place customer service in the keystone position it should be in then train the right front line employees in customer service techniques and your company's expectations of them; it will improve your bottom line. It cannot be stated strongly or often enough; happy employees mean happy customers. Happy customers convert into clients who bring in new customers.

Conflict:

In starting the discussion on conflict resolution please take for an example the story of an audio engineer working in a major multimedia facility driving state of the art equipment bringing decades of operational experience to each session. Enter a fairly young producer/director for a simple voice over recording session directing nonprofessional talent for a two minute read. It should be a simple session, or so it would seem on the surface. Not all is as it appears to be when it comes to human interactions, especially on the surface.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

During the voice over session the producer was tasked with conveying their client's message to an unseen audience via a nonprofessional voice over talent who had a difficult time relating to the direction coming from the producer. It created a stressful session for the producer who was not getting the results they had anticipated. The reasonability simple script held by the engineer resembled a Paris road map at the conclusion of added numbers, lines and arrows relating to the location, as well as the accepted readings, of multiple attempts, of selected sections and sentences by the voice over talent. The takes came nonstop and in rapid succession. The engineer worked at a brisk pace just to keep the edit decision list current. Toward the end of the script, suddenly out of the blue, the producer looked over to the engineer and asked, "Which read do you like better?" The engineer looked up from the notes and quickly replied, while keeping an eye on the counter as to not miss any critical information, "I'm just trying to keep up with the EDL, I'm sorry, I have to count on you to gauge the performance." The producer smiled and went back to directing the talent in the voice over booth.

After the session had ended, pleasantries exchanged by all parties and the recorded files had been successfully edited and delivered, the producer called the engineer's manager to complain. The producer charged that the engineer was "Unwilling to help them with their session". Two years later that same producer will not work with that engineer but they are still utilizing the business. Many important elements came together in that customer service event to provide conflict resolution as well as maintain an excellent level of customer satisfaction for both the customer and the business. Hopefully they're chronicled well here for the author was the engineer of that session.

Conflict Resolution

You probably see hostile people every day. They tend to treat most folks around them like their own personal dumping ground for everything that has ever gone wrong in their lives. You'll find they have a propensity towards sarcasm or abusive behavior and may even attempt to intimidate you. Come on, honestly, they are no fun to be around or deal with. An experience with one of these folks can quickly ruin what started out to be a perfectly pleasant day.

Although the Black Hat sitting on your shoulder whispers in your ear that it is okay to respond in kind to an abusive or irritated person, doing so usually inflames the situation. Ask me how I know. Yelling back or trading insults will only result in negative outcomes for you and your business.

Do you have time to waste arguing and yelling? If you're like the rest of us you have way too much else happening in your life than to be spending your time in a fruitless, time munching, energy draining chess match of emotional mechanisms. However, you do need to deal with hostile customers whenever they present themselves. You need to resolve the conflicted situation as quickly and successfully as possible so you can get back to your work and resume what could still turn out to be a pleasant day.

Conflict resolve begins with understanding angry people. This understanding helps us to be less reactive and less likely to lose our own temper. Understanding angry people requires us to turn an uncomfortable eye inward and ask:

What's the angry person looking for?

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

Just having their problem solved is usually not the entire, if even the real story. Really angry people need an opportunity to vent. They want to be heard and have their problem acknowledged. If you try to side step their anger and move too quickly towards solving their problem, you most likely will upset them further making your life just a little more miserable in the process.

When a person is initially denied something, let's say, help from an engineer, they can get to a point where the original problem becomes a secondary issue. Yeah, they want the problem solved, but after a point is made. They get themselves so worked up that they are unwilling to work positively to get what they started out wanting in the first place. Even if it was possible to work something out with them, they would still be angry.

Don't take it personally

It is imperative to remember that with angry customers, while their conduct is directed at you and can be personally insulting, the real source of their anger exist somewhere else. An angry person is not usually upset at you as a person. They are usually irritated at you for being a part of an organization or system they perceive as being unfeeling or unhelpful. It is difficult to yell or abuse an entire organization; that'll anger the customer even more and then they will direct that additional anger towards you. "Rolling with the punches" is easier said than done.

Strategy... perspective... the "big picture"

Following are some specific strategies you can employ to help take control of potential hostile customer situations calming them before they escalate into a major time commanding conflict.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

- ✚ Observe how customers approach you. Prepare yourself on approach for the possibility that they may have hostile intentions.
 - Upset people show signs of aggression even before they open their mouths. Look for non-verbal clues which may include hunched shoulders, clenched fists, red face, fidgeting, restlessness and staring or avoidance of eye contact. Law enforcement officers refer to these behavioral signs as “Hinky” behavior.

- ✚ The element of surprise will always command over those who are unprepared. Hostile situations get out of hand when the unprepared react too quickly to hostile behavior because they “didn’t see it coming”.

Alpha:

When you see a hostile person approach prepare yourself by telling you that you control the situation. In order to do so you need to keep yourself under control first. If you get angry too, you are going to do nothing more than contribute in multiples to the rapid deterioration of the situation. A primary tactic taught to young firefighters for self-control before entering an IDLH (Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health) environment is to breath. Take a moment, breath in, breath out (calm yourself), engage.

Secondly:

When you are in a conflict situation with a hostile customer you must make every effort to present yourself as just another human being doing the best that you possibly can. It is important to realize that to an angry person, trying is not doing, you are “doing” the best you possibly can, not “trying to do”, that only adds fuel to the fire burning inside the

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

angry customer. When an angered person perceives you as an object or a piece of bureaucracy they will dehumanize you and be more likely to become even more aggressive. However, when an angered person sees you as just another human being doing the best they can for them in their situation, they will generally start to show a less hostile behavior.

Tactics ... day-to-day activities which are repeatable

Ideas are great but without substance offer very little in the heat of battle. Following are some tactics that can help answer: Just how the bleep do you do this?

- 1) Be honestly friendly. Speak to another as you want them to speak to you, sincere and respectful.
- 2) Use the angry person's name as soon as possible. Introduce yourself if that fits the situation.
- 3) Greet the person respectfully. Don't look up from your work and say "Yeah?" That does not make you look like a friendly human. It makes you look like you're a part of a machine. Try using steps one and two above for a greeting.
- 4) Listen carefully. Show people you are listening by paraphrasing back to them what they just said to you. This shows them a genuine interest and concern on your part for what they have to say. The most common error made by people is they don't allow others to finish their thoughts.
- 5) Excuses are the foundations of road blocks on the path to enlightenment. Do not make excuses, only offer solutions. All an excuse is to an angered person is a vehicle

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

that transforms the person making the excuse from a human being into a machine, a bureaucracy, a policy, a “can’t” or a “wont”. All are fuel for conflict.

Reprise

Every hostile situation is different, not all solutions will work all the time. More often than not an angry customer will not pose a clear and present danger but if it appears it could become so calmly remove yourself and immediately contact law enforcement. Early detection is again, the key. The general principles outlined here are to be arranged by employing prompt observation skills of potential angry customers early in the process. Favor is always with the prepared. It is vital that when you find yourself in a hostile customer environment you make sure you come across to an angered customer as a real person, not some bureaucratic, don’t give a hoot; take a number buddy, uncaring, monotone machine.

It’s hard to frown in Disneyland, everyone is smiling.

In regards to the aforementioned producer; the author’s manager found a solution that satisfied the producer keeping their account intact. His solution was to provide a replacement engineer for future sessions. This can be a tricky tactic for conflict resolution if not handled well. This referral came at the client’s request which made it easy for the manger to handle with the client but he had to remind his replaced engineer to: “Not take it personally”.

Referrals

When customers are transferred to other members within an organization, they can feel frustrated and possibly become hostile if they feel they are getting the “run around”.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

In dealings with the public it would be rare if you didn't have to refer a customer somewhere else for service or information. It could be as simple as the person being in the wrong place, or they are required to see several people in sequence and you are the first in what appears to the customer to be a long laborious line. Sometimes, the customer's issue has to be addressed by someone with a higher authority level which puts the angry customer into wait mode. Angry customers hate the wait mode. It does give them the chance to get angrier however, so avoid the wait mode to the best of your abilities.

A reality of business is that some referring is necessary. Modern customers have reluctantly come to expect this type of treatment. Every so often a customer will prepare for the shuffle by behaving in a hostile manner towards the one they are being transferred to even though they may have never met the person. A common complaint employee's make is that when customers are referred to them, they are not provided with enough information to be informed and helpful to the customer. It is embarrassing for the employee and frustrating for the customer.

Here are a few ideas to help ease customer frustration and hopefully help the employee that the reluctant customer is being transferred too. Having been the receiving employee of reluctant referred customers I can honestly say my life would have been easier if someone would have considered the following thoughts:

- ✚ Doing everything reasonable to ensure that the customer is not required to repeat their story to the next person.

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

- When transferring a customer to another staff member, ensure you have made every effort possible to brief that staff member about the particulars of the customer's problem. When transferring via a phone system, use one that allows conferencing so you can have a brief 3-way conversation in order to introduce the customer to the next staff member.

- ✚ Keep a list of names and phone numbers of other employees who you might refer your clients too. You should have a good idea of the kinds of services your clients may need so it's a good idea to learn who supplies those services in and outside of your service area. Whenever possible, establish a personal contact with those service providers to find out if and how they can help your customers. Again, it is the prepared that win the day.

- ✚ Hostile customers may be calmed down by referring them to a supervisor or person of authority. People tend to manifest less aggressive behavior when they speak to a supervisor. Its perceived value, the client perceives that their issue carries more weight, or has more value, in speaking with someone of authority. It empowers them. However, protocols for a customer referral do need to be established between you and your supervisor. It needs to be clear when customers should be referred as well as how they should be referred (e.g. number given; escorted to supervisor's office, supervisor calls customer, etc.)

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

- When referring a customer to a supervisor makes sure the supervisor is aware of the problem, including the emotional state of the customer (hostile, angry, threatening).

- ✚ In advance to referring customers to another member of your immediate organization try providing options for the customer. An example would be to offer that the person sit and relax for a moment or point them to the lounge, offer them coffee or refreshment while you pull all of their information together. If the customer is off site offer to take their phone number for a call back once you have gathered all the information you need to service the customers issue. Let the customer choose. It will reduce hostility.

- ✚ Before handing over a customer, make sure you understand the customer's situation and what their expectations are. The biggest error employees make is not listening to the customer, or not asking the right questions by assuming the referral is in order. Good listening skills are essential. If they are not applied the customer may be referred to the wrong place or person, resulting in frustration for everybody.

- ✚ When referring, tell the customer how long the wait will be or what to expect next. If there's a procedure to be followed, explain it to the customer if necessary. If the wait is longer than expected, make every effort to convey to the

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

customer the extra time needed to resolve their issue and by all means apologize to them for the delay.

It's always the little things that make the biggest difference. Keep in mind that when referring a customer you are trying to:

- Reduce the need for the customer to retell their story from the beginning.
- Show the customer that you are making every effort to reduce their frustration.
- Reduce the waiting time for the customer.
- Be knowledgeable and refer customers to the right place the first time.

Moments of Truth

First impressions of an organization and the people that work there are formed instantly in the customer's eye. When dealing with an angry customer it is important to appreciate just what the angry customer is seeing. It is also important to understand that their anger will determine everything they are going to be able to see. The angrier and more agitated the customer is the more selective their attention becomes. It turns into a selective confirmation of their initial beliefs and they will most likely see only what they need to see for a confirmation of their position.

An example of this would a person who is angry because they see an infraction to their belief system (...the engineer should be more helpful) and will search out only those things available to confirm their supposition (He's just sitting there, why can't he help?). In reality we all do this, but a frustrated or angry person uses selective perception more

often, with greater intensity, and are least likely to budge from it once they have established a position.

As discussed earlier, it is imperative to recognize a potentially angry customer early in the process to avoid any unnecessary negative interaction between them and your business. There are defining instants in every hostile customer interaction called moments of truth. They will establish whether the customer views you as a friend or foe. These moments determine if the customer is going to create a problem or not for you and your fellow employees. These moments of truth are more than obvious when they present themselves if you are an observant participant in the day's events. If you handle these moments effectively you will end up improving your day as well as be representing your company in excellent customer service form.

Sound Practices:

"The goal as a company is to have customer service that is not just the best, but legendary."

SAM WALTON ...founder of K-Mart

In closing, businesses must make certain that they continue to work hard towards customer satisfaction on a daily basis. For a customer service program to be successful it should be ingrained throughout the entire company. It has to be an integral part of the organization's mission statement and vision from the day of inception. Following that, the rest tends to be simple. Your program will carry over to your products, your advertising, your staffing, and every other aspect of your business.

Instilling Customer Loyalty

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

Experts in business consistently reference several tangible steps small business owners can take to guarantee they are providing legendary service to their customers. These include:

- **Creation of a quality customer program:** Companies prepared with tangible, easily understood guidelines for instituting and maintaining a quality customer service program will go far toward satisfying clients.
- **Communicate with customers:** Communicating with customers is generally easier done by smaller businesses than larger companies who are habitually slowed down by layers of bureaucracy. Methods of communication can include:
 - Telephone calls
 - Newsletters
 - Surveys
 - Face-to-face conversation.

These types of communication interactions can help guide small businesses both in meeting the current concerns of their customers and in anticipating their future issues. Consultants who counsel business owners that specialize in making big-ticket sales advise them to maintain a good communication stream with their customers as well. In addition, consultants observe that communication with ex-customers is helpful as well. A lost customer may offer your business a reason that points to a potentially serious problem within your organization.

- **Communicate with front-line employees:** Employees who are kept “in the loop” regarding changes in their companies’ products and services are far more likely to

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

satisfy a customer's needs than those who are furnished with outdated or incomplete information.

- **Retention of employees:** Many customers establish a certain comfort level over time with individual employees and these relationships should be valued and nurtured by business owners. Every customer is unique and has special needs, the longer an employee and customer work together, the more easily those special needs can be met. Companies that hope for long-term relationships with their customers need equally healthy relationships with their employees. In particular, they must encourage employee involvement by creating a sense of ownership in the employee for the company they work for.
- **Invest in technology that aids customer service:** Make it easy for customers to contact the person or department in your business that they wish to reach. Nobody likes to be kept on hold. Technology systems will also help small businesses gather information about their customers allowing them to better gauge the health of their business.
- **Promote an atmosphere of courtesy:** Small gestures such as friendly smiles use of a customer's first name, and small favors can have a positive impact on the way a business is viewed. Small acts of kindnesses carry a lot of weight.
- **Address mistakes promptly and honorably:** No business is or person is infallible. Errors inevitably occur within any business framework, and sooner or later a customer will be impacted. Business experts contend that in many instances these incidents actually help strengthen the bond between a company and its customers. In the normal

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

course of a business relationship the depth of a vendor's commitment will not be put to the test, but a serious mistake on the business's part will quickly reveal just how trustworthy that vendor is.

- **Avoid equating price with customer service:** Most small businesses find it difficult to compete with larger high-volume competitors in the realm of price. Most analysts maintain that this reality should not be thought of as a failure in the realm of customer service. More to the point, most experts say that many small businesses can overcome price differences, given that they are relatively minor, by putting an extra emphasis on customer service. For some customers price is all that matters. Those are customers you can live without.

- **Create a user-friendly physical environment:** Business owners should attempt to design their company's physical layout for maximum efficiency, clarity of signage, lighting, accessibility for the disabled and simplistic eloquence of interior design. Everything should be easy to find in an environment inspiring ergonomic and emotional comfort.

Any one of these tactics might not be enough to sway a customer into beginning a long-term relationship with your company but combined with one another they become a potent attraction to consumers and other businesses alike.

Thomas A. Stewart commented in Fortune:

"...customer satisfaction—deep satisfaction, the kind that creates loyalty—isn't likely to result from one big thing.... A customer's decision to be loyal or to defect is instead the sum of many small encounters with your company."

Cutting Ties With Bad Customers

It is a reality of life that a small percentage of customers are simply incapable of being satisfied with the service they receive. By nature business owners are generally averse to letting any customers go. Business consultants maintain that some clients can simply become more trouble than they are worth for any number of reasons. The answer to determining whether or not a business owner should sever ties with a difficult customer lies in semantics. A “customer” is someone who makes your business money. Someone who cost your business money is called a liability.

Listed below are several scenarios where business consultants recommend small businesses consider ending their relationship with a troublesome customer.

Customer attitudes and actions that should prompt an honest assessment include:

- Lack of respect or appreciation for the business owner's work.
- Excessive demands, either on company or individual staff members.
- Unreasonable expectations in terms of monetary arrangements.
- Proclivity for imposing difficult or unrealistic deadlines.
- Tendency to pay bills late (or not at all).
- Treats company as a commodity that can be discarded as soon as it ceases to be useful.

In some cases, honest communication with the client can salvage a deteriorating relationship, but this will not always work. Honestly, if your attempts to make the

Customer Service 4 Recording Studios

relationship a mutually productive one fail it may be time to move on and focus on more profitable customers or prospective ones. Calculate what you will lose in gross revenue then decide if your business can stand the financial hit. If your business is able to withstand the loss of revenue, move forward to terminate the relationship in a professional manner. If not, then the company's leadership needs to develop a strategy to expand existing business relationships or bring in new clients so your company can sever relations with the offending customer later down the line when the hit will have less of an impact on your bottom line.

Conclusion:

We as individuals make up the exchange process of trade. We have skills and needs that we trade amongst ourselves to survive. We are all unique individuals who share personality traits called personas. As in life something's attract one another and others repel. It is a law of nature of which we as natural beings are susceptible too. It is imperative for the survivorship of any business to maximize on the attraction side of the human interface. The key is in not using yourself as a yardstick to gauge the needs of others. Treat others as they would want to be treated by you. There is the foundation of your new customer service program, now go out and make a difference.