

The Power of Listening

How the Simple Act of Listening Can Ensure Your Customer's Satisfaction

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Unhappy customers are often viewed as difficult customers. Companies either bend over backwards to make them happy with “the customer is always right” approach or the relationship ends, with negative repercussions.

The “customer is always right” approach can backfire, creating monsters. Much like rewarding a bratty child, rewarding a customer for finding fault, may encourage them to find fault in the future in search of that discount or extra service the last problem generated.

Of course ending a relationship on a bad note creates obvious repercussions. Not only have you lost a customer, word of mouth or negative internet reviews add up to the loss of many prospective customers.

Think about the times you have complained to the cable company or the department store. How were you treated? Were you interrupted? Did the person on the other end of the phone talk over you? Did you feel you had to fight, or yell, or worse just to say what you needed or wanted to say?

So how can you preserve and strengthen a business/customer relationship? It's simple. Listen.

Too often, we don't listen. We interrupt, we jump in. We ask for the customer's receipt or other information about the transaction. We're quick to tell the person the answer before they have finished telling us the situation. We don't just stop and listen.

Listening is an active exchange and for some of us, it takes practice to listen well. Here are the basic steps.

1. Assure the customer that you want to hear his/her complaint. Then listen! Clear your mind. You may be rehearsing what you are going to say, or thinking about what you would say if you could be rude, or you may even be thinking about what you plan to do on Saturday. These are all blocks to

listening. Whenever you realize your mind is grappling with an argument or drifting to anything other than understanding what your customer thinks and feels, redirect your mind back to listening.

2. Ask clarifying questions. This is your only excuse to interrupt. But do not use questions to take over the conversation or push it into another direction. Simply clarify whatever was vague and allow the customer to continue. Take notes if necessary to gather the information being shared. Jot down your questions and ask at appropriate times. You may need to wait until the customer is completely talked out or questions may be appropriate in the first few minutes. Just make sure the customer knows you want to hear everything they have to say.
3. Active listening includes reflection or reiteration. In other words, repeat the main points back to your customer in your own words, letting them know you are just clarifying to be sure you understand all the facts. This step is crucial. This is the step where the customer feels heard. And most of the time, this is the point at which the customer feels that you are both on the same team, working together to solve the problem.
4. Come to a resolution. Even if the end result would have been the same, customers who are allowed to vent feel heard. They feel respected.

We have all experienced poor customer service. Excellent customer service creates loyal customers. They will go out of their way to hire you or purchase goods from you, even when your competitors offer lower prices.