

# Avoid Customer Disservice

A customer's opinion isn't just formed on what you do, but what you don't do



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There's a lot of talk about the importance of providing quality customer service and superior customer experiences to improve customer loyalty and sales. In fact, these topics are the primary elements of my training and consulting practices for the tire and auto service industry.

On the flip side, there's relatively little dialogue about the aspects that turn customers off, harm customer relationships and can ultimately have customers not only leave your business for a competitor, but do so while complaining about your business to everyone they come into contact with.

Allow me to provide you a very personal experience. Not long ago I returned home from a family vacation in sunny San Diego. I didn't know (or expect) it going in, but left with plenty of examples of what not to do when providing proper customer service.

First, please know I am removing the name of the place we stayed at because this is not intended to slam them directly, but rather learn from their mistakes and ensure you're not doing the same at your tire/auto service business.

## First Class Experience?

First of all, this was not a bargain basement motor lodge. It was a high-end, "luxury resort" that advertises "first-class" vacation experiences. Sounds wonderful, let's go!

Traveling with another family, we required two separate rooms. Using

a special credit card promotion, I was able to secure a desirable "free room upgrade," a favorable savings of \$50 per night.

was most helpful saying that my room upgrades were "all set" and would be waiting for us when we got there.



***There is more to customer service than being polite and smiling a lot. You can smile all day, but if you don't follow through on commitments or meet the customer's expectations, the effect is diminished and may be viewed as insincere.***

On the online reservation return receipt, I noticed that room upgrades are "based on availability," so I promptly called the hotel for clarification and was told to call back a week before traveling out and they could reserve the room upgrades at that time.

Enter Patsy. Patsy and I had a wonderful conversation, and she

So we got there and, lo and behold, found that was only half true. Seems only one room was available, the other was not. Not particularly good news and not what we were expecting, I explained my previous "all set" call with Patsy. The reply from the front desk: "Patsy is in reservations, she doesn't upgrade rooms."

Let me see if I have this straight... Patsy is in reservations and she doesn't manage reservations?

You would think the person most empowered to manage reservations would be the person whose job is to interact with customers on their reservations line, right? Evidently, wrong. So much for being "all set."

Lesson 1: Be accountable. A big part of delivering great customer service is assuming responsibility and standing behind your commitments. Tire and auto service professionals already have their work cut out for them to gain customers' trust. Broken commitments are a warning sign of mistrust that can seriously jeopardize the health of the relationship.

Also, if you empower employees to do a job, allow them the opportunity to do that job. Patsy was told she was in charge of reservations, but wasn't permitted to do that job, creating an unnecessary problem for customers.

You will never see this type of "it's not her job" finger pointing at the elite customer service establishments. They focus on making it right for the external customer, not on who made it wrong internally.

In any event, it is up to the service provider to take ownership of each customer's transaction with the business and see to it that they are well taken care of from start to finish.

### Looking to Eat

Now in the room, we realize there's no silverware, glasses, plates

→ TAKEAWAYS

IN CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- BE ACCOUNTABLE
- NEVER MAKE YOUR CUSTOMER FEEL LIKE THEY DID SOMETHING WRONG – THEY DIDN'T
- IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S WHAT YOU DO THAT MATTERS

## WORLD-CLASS CUSTOMER SERVICE CAN ONLY COME WHEN YOU HAVE UNITY BETWEEN WHAT YOUR CUSTOMER-FACING EMPLOYEES ARE SAYING AND WHAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY DOING.

or any other utensils in our kitchen. So I called the front desk. Remarkably, the first response was "many guests bring these household items with them." We traveled across the country from Boston to San Diego with two kids and four suitcases. Did they actually expect us to pack our kitchen items as well?

Lesson 2: Never make your customer feel like they did something wrong. When a customer feels like they're being accused of wrongdoing, they typically get defensive, annoyed and uncomfortable. Obviously, these are not the best emotions for positive customer relations. Never make the issue the issue. Focus instead on what you can do to help the customer.

Done properly, the front desk staff should have replied with something like, "I'm sorry to hear that, we should have asked you upon reservation if you would like us to supply the kitchen with these items, I'll see that this gets taken care of right away."

### Continuing Saga

Amazingly, after that call no kitchen utensils were delivered, so a few hours later, I called the front desk again. Each time, the staff member on the other end of the line was polite, helpful sounding and ensured us it would be taken care of in short order. But nothing happened. So the next morning while staring at our dry cereal, we decided to physically go to the front desk. Once again, the smiling staff member entered the information into "the system" and ensured us that the utensils would be sent up right away.

When nothing materialized a few hours later I made a "last call," to make it clear that we were beyond displeased, had no faith in anything that was spoken to us and asked which manager I needed to speak

with if nothing happened after that call either. That's all it took to get some kitchen utensils at this "luxury resort."

Lesson 3: It's not what you say, it's what you do. The old adage is true: Actions speak louder than words. Saying it is not the important part. Doing it is.

Many people think providing great customer service is being friendly, polite and smiling a lot. That's essential, but it's only part of the total equation.

You can smile all day but if you don't fulfill your commitments and meet customer expectations then the net effect is greatly diminished, customers ultimately view the gestures as insincere, and you'll end up with an unhappy customer.

Unfortunately, we experienced at least a couple more similar incidents of customer disservice that week. Clearly, there is a detrimental disconnect between what staff members are demonstrating/saying (their behaviors) and what they're doing (their actions and execution) at this vacation resort.

True world-class customer service can only come from a unity between the two and it is imperative that your customer-facing employees effectively manage the whole process.

After all, remember this famous Ben Franklin quote: "Well done is better than well said." ■

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