

Is Bad Customer Service Killing Your Business?

By Tim Knox



It's time to beat the old bad customer service drum again. I know, I'm sick of beating the drum, too, but as long as bad customer service runs rampant through so many businesses I feel it is my entrepreneurial duty to bring it to your attention. So grab a pew and prepare to listen to the sermon I've preached before: bad customer service is the bane of business. If the Almighty smote down every business that dispenses bad customer service the world would be a much friendlier, albeit much sparser place. Consider a world without malls and fast food joints... would it really be so bad?

What puzzles me most is if bad customer service is such a death knell for business, why do so many businesses allow it to go on? Don't they read my column, for Pete's sake? I think the problem is that most bad customer service is doled out (or at least condoned) by business owners and managers who have ceased caring what their customers think. When you stop caring what your customers think it's time to close the doors. Go find a day job. You'll make someone a wonderfully disgruntled employee.

My latest parable of lousy customer service was actually experienced by my better half while attempting to buy my daughter a pair of basketball shoes. I won't mention the name of the sporting goods chain store in which the bad customer service took place, but I will tell you that its name is similar to the sound a frog with hiccups might make.

As my wife waited for someone to assist, the four or five teenagers who had been charged with manning the store stood in a clump at the cash register giggling and flirting with one another as if they were at the prom instead of at work.

When my wife pointed out this fact, one of the employees, a cheeky lass of 16 or so, put her hands on her hips and said, "How rude!" The males in the group didn't react at all. They were too busy arguing over who could take a break so they could chase other cheeky lasses about the mall.

Needless to say my lovely bride, who has the ability to instill fear into the hearts of even the most worthless employees, left the gaggle of giggling teen idiots standing with their mouths open in disbelief. How dare a customer tell them to do that with a pair of basketball shoes?

As much as I bemoan bad customer service I celebrate good customer service. It should be applauded and the purveyor of said good customer service should be rewarded for actually delivering satisfaction to the customer above and beyond the call of duty.

So let me tell you the story of my new hero, Ken. I won't tell you the name of the store in which Ken works, but let's just say they started out selling radios in a shack somewhere long, long ago.

I first met Ken when I went into the store to buy a mixing board for my business that records audio products for the Web. In a nutshell, you plug microphones into the mixing board then connect it to the computer and you can record audio directly to digital format. Totally beside the point of this article, but I didn't want you thinking that I was purchasing non-manly cooking utensils.

When I got the mixer installed it didn't work. So I boxed it up and headed back to the store to return it. When I told Ken my problem he didn't just grunt and give me my money back as so many bad customer service reps would do. Instead he asked, "Do you mind if I try it?"

"Knock yourself out," was my reply, confident that if I couldn't get it to work, neither could Ken. Ken took the mixer out of the box and went about hooking it up to one of the computers on display. He started pulling power cords and cables off the display racks and ripping them open and plugging them in. He tore open a new microphone and an adapter and kept going until he had the mixer hooked up and working. Yes, I said working. It turns out the mixer was fine. I just had the wrong power adapter.

Ken could have just given me my money back and been done with me. Instead he spent 15 minutes and opened a number of other packages that I was under no obligation to buy just to help me get the thing working.

I was so impressed that I not only kept the mixing board, I also bought another \$50 worth of products. And the next time I need anything electronic guess where I will buy it? Even if it costs twice as much, I'll buy it from Ken.

Now here's the moral of the story: if you are a business owner who has a gaggle of teenagers in charge of customer service at your store you would be better off replacing them with wild monkeys.

At least monkeys can be trained.

Here's to your success!

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