

The Service Experience: Servicing Your Customers

By Carol Ann Livernoche

If your customers were asked to describe their experience with you and your organization, what do you think that they would say? If it takes you a while to ponder this question, you may also want to ask yourself how well you communicate with your customers.

Looking at this topic from a customer perspective, many times the first point of frustration is how to communicate with a provider. A perfect case in point, is the sea of technology that you must navigate through when using an automated telephone system. There is prompt after prompt to bury you deep within the tunnels of options when all you really want to do is to speak to someone. By the time (if ever) you figure out how to contact a human, your patience level has been severely tested. I recently had one of these experiences that changed my opinion of a long-time provider from very positive to extremely negative.

Early in my career, I worked as a customer service representative. I remember being told that “one happy customer will tell one other customer (or prospect) of their experience, but one unhappy customer is likely to tell ten”. With that in mind, what are the key things that your customer-facing employees need to do to ensure that your customers have a positive experience and impression about you and your team? In conversations with our customers, we are consistently hearing how customer service levels are closely watched and how important a positive customer experience is in winning their mindshare.

Some key things for your team to keep in mind when talking with customers:

- **Prepare.** If it is a planned event, use a call or meeting planner to organize the purpose, objectives, and things that need to be accomplished during the meeting.
- **Actively Listen.** When dealing with a customer, you have a wide range of knowledge and understanding, as well as preparation. Listen to what the customer has already attempted on their own, and listen to what their real concern or question is.
- **Minimize gadgets.** If you are busy playing with a PDA or typing into a laptop, you can be sure that you will miss key points – not to mention that it is simply annoying.

- **Ask questions.** In order to have a clear understanding of the level of explanation needed by the customer, and to have enough information to give a right answer, the first time, ask enough questions so that you clearly understand what needs to be addressed.
- **Keep it simple.** Especially when you are dealing with a customer on the phone, you don't have the advantage of visuals. Think about what can be absorbed realistically, and pace your explanation in a way that matches the customer's ability to understand.
- **Actions speak louder than words.** Even if you are not face-to-face with a customer, your body language, posture, and mood come across in the conversation. So, whether you are in the same room or not, be cognizant of your body language and the fact that it speaks volumes.

Positive customer experiences are really very easy to create. Just think about how you would react, what you would hear, and what you would think if you were in the customer's place. There is no magic to a great customer service experience – just attention to details and fundamentals.