

How to Improve Credibility With Customers

by Sandy Geroux

Congratulations, you've just made a great sale! But your customer has just called with an unexpected problem. What you (or your representatives) say and do next can make or break the relationship you just spent a long time nurturing.

Here are three tips to be sure the next message your customer receives is a WOW one that creates the right impression, gives them an exceptional customer experience, and lets them know that you care about them and their satisfaction above just about all else.

1. **Turn Your Assumptions Around.** It's a terrible fact that customer service representatives get so beaten up by customers that they begin to approach every call as if it will be adversarial. This assumption causes their entire demeanor to suffer, from their energy, to the friendliness of their voice, to their willingness to investigate - and could turn a would-have-been-pleasant customer into a further-aggravated one. The best way to combat this is to immediately treat everyone with respect and dignity. Even though it may be frustrating, and you may not be able to believe what they're saying could be true, treat them as though it really did happen the way they say it did. In other words, give them the benefit of the doubt. While some customers thrive on "getting something for nothing", most call with legitimate complaints, either due to a mishap or a miscommunication. Resist the temptation to treat all customers alike, thus alienating legitimate customers by treating them with cynicism and disrespect before they do anything disrespectful on their own. Remember, if you don't like being treated as though all reps are alike, customers won't like being treated as though they're all alike, either.

Case in Point: Nordstrom did not become one of the most successful high-end brands by alienating customers. Whenever anyone returned an item (even if it wasn't bought there), it was treated as a legitimate return (which it usually was), taken "back", and the customer given at least store credit, which they then used to buy items at Nordstrom that they may not have otherwise done! By always assuming the BEST in people, rather than the WORST, they create WOW experiences for all customers, which translates to more and more loyalty to them.

2. **Even if what they're saying is unreasonable, stay calm.** Be patient in words and tone. Listen for the problem behind the yelling. Don't respond to yelling with more yelling; this just perpetuates the cycle of anger and disrespect. Try to "hear" what they're really asking for, and give it to them, if at all possible... or at least give them as much as you can toward solving their problem.

Case in Point: A relocation client I worked with told me they were once called by a man who was angry that the couple's furniture couldn't be delivered by the next Friday (an impossible feat given the short timeframe and number of miles the driver had to cover). Instead of letting him go away angry, or yelling at him in return, the Manager asked a couple of simple questions: "Why is it so important for the furniture to be delivered on Friday? Is there something in there that you need that

day?" The man answered that his wife had (arbitrarily) chosen Friday as the day she wanted to unpack and get settled in their new home. The man was trying to appease his wife by forcing the

Workplace: Where employees have to go because they make a paycheck

WOWplace: Where people love to go because they make a difference



company to do as she wished, but it was impossible for them to comply with this request. However, instead of getting upset, she heard his frustration and decided to create a WOW. She told him to let his wife know that the items would definitely be there on Saturday and she could plan for that day. She then sent the man a gift card to a local restaurant for Friday night, and told him to take his wife out and have a nice glass of wine (or another beverage) on the company in preparation for the hard work they had ahead of them on Saturday. WOW! For \$25, she salvaged a \$4,000 client, who then referred others because they had an incredible experience with the company.

- 3. Focus forward (on what you can do), not backward (on pointing fingers and placing blame).** Always focus forward. It doesn't move you or your customer to the point of satisfaction and loyalty to remain rooted in the cause of the problem. Fix it - quickly!! Or find a way to research the problem and fix it later, even if it's to refund their money because you can't fix it. Customers want solutions; this is why they call. They don't want to get anyone in trouble (unless they've already been treated very badly), they don't want to be made to feel stupid, and they don't want to waste an hour accomplishing what should have been done in 10 minutes. By allow the customer and the company to save face, and move on to more positive actions quickly, you keep the negative experience to a minimum. Eliminate the following words from your company's vocabulary:

"Who told you that?" (This doesn't sound like you want to train your employees better; it sounds accusatory.) Replace it with: *"So that we may ensure proper training of our staff, do you mind telling me who gave you that information?"*... and then move on to the solution to the problem.

"You must have misunderstood." (If you weren't there, you don't know if they misunderstood or not.) Replace this sentence with: *"I'm so sorry that this information wasn't communicated properly to you. The correct information is ____."* - and then move on to the solution to the problem.

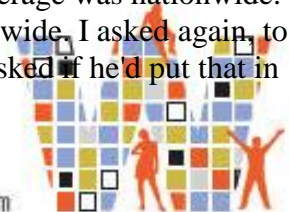
Here are a couple of bonus tips:

- 1. Eliminate the possibility of "phone rage".** Many people are frustrated before they make the call; having to press 39 buttons just to get to speak with a human being may have just pushed them over the edge. Can you reduce the number of buttons they need to push? Can you give them an option (the very first one) to immediately reach a human being if they're experiencing a problem with your product or service? Do they really need to listen to the fact that they must "push 2 to get to Accounts Receivable, 3 to ask a billing question, 4 if they'd like to make an appointment, and 5 if they'd like to hear more options" - and then it starts all over again!
- 2. Be sure you and all your salespeople REALLY know/learn about your products and services and all their nuances.** If you don't know an answer, don't guess... check it out immediately to ensure proper understanding and communication back to the customer. And if the customer is pointing to something that seems to contradict your understanding of the product or service, check it out- don't just assume you are correct!

Case in Point: I once inquired about a cell phone service and asked if the coverage was nationwide. The salesperson said yes, but a map on the wall did not look like it was nationwide. I asked again, to be sure. Yes, I've been selling this service for months - it's nationwide. So, I asked if he'd put that in

Workplace: Where employees have to go because they make a paycheck

WOWplace: Where people love to go because they make a difference



writing on the contract. He didn't want to do that. Finally, to prove to me that he was right, he called to a supervisor, "Is this plan nationwide?", to which his supervisor said, "No! That plan has never been nationwide."

Knowing the products up front helps eliminate the angry calls that happen later on when customers realize they did not get what they paid for... a situation which worsens when they get only attitude from companies who assume they're trying to pull something over on them.

Build sales and loyalty by creating WOW customer impressions and experiences every step of the way... from the point of sale to the point of problems to the point of them spreading word-of-mouth advertising and helping you do it all over again.

With over 27 years of speaking and training experience, national speaker and author Sandy Geroux delivers motivational and educational programs to help "Turn Your Workplace Into a WOWplace™", helping organizations create WOW experiences for customers and employees alike by fostering a culture of trust, compassion and commitment to values, service and respect.

<http://www.thewowplace.com> or contact sandy@thewowplace.com or call 407-856-1188.

Workplace: Where employees have to go because they make a paycheck

WOWplace: Where people love to go because they make a difference

