

Sales and Service Excellence

ESSENTIALS

» 07.2014

Vol.13 No. 07

Essentials of
team leadership

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Bending the Rules

Helps winning and keeping customers

 By John Tschohl

There are rules for a reason; they work for most people most of the time. Often scientific evidence backs them up. However, as with almost any other endeavor in society that doesn't involve criminal activity, rules can sometime be broken -- or at least bent -- without the world coming to an end.

This is especially true in business. Company owners and top executives give a lot of thought to winning and keeping customers -- and spend a lot of time and money on things such as PR, leadership training, social media campaigns etc. etc. However, the real front lines of building a business are in the daily interactions employees have with customers.



One of the major roadblocks to customer service excellence is policies/procedures most companies have in place to make sure that one percent of their customers don't take advantage of them. Meanwhile, the other 99 percent of their customers are frustrated. When front-line employees are restricted with ridiculous policies and procedures, the process of servicing customers is dramatically slowed down and customers are essentially given the boot and will soon be greeted with open arms by the competition.

Get Rid of Stupid Rules. Sounds simple but in reality, as the rules don't always apply, make a decision to bend some and for sure to break some.

Look at all the policies, procedures and systems you have in place that make life miserable for your customers. You could have the nicest people in the world, but you could have stupid hours, stupid rules, and stupid procedures that just burn customers.

If you have policies that slow down tasks or require two or three sets of eyes and signatures for approval, you are wasting time and money... speed up the process and eliminate time wasters.

Bend the Rules. Rules stop employees from thinking for themselves and for customers. In order to ensure customer satisfaction and deliver against the very demanding expectation of your customers, you should try to widen your employees' customer service skills by teaching them how to bend the rules. It's not about breaking the rules, but bending them to keep customers happy. Put yourself in your customer's place and ask... do you like to feel valued, listened to and have your requests respected? How do you feel when an organization solves your problem without any hassle? How do you feel when they cannot or will not fix your problems at all?

It's critically important for businesses to give employees the power to make decisions on the spot because one policy can't cover everything. There are too many unexpected things that happen every day.

Service Recovery. In all organizations mistakes happen. Things go wrong. Employees need to know they don't have to follow a canned script. They are allowed to think like owners of the company. They need to know they should treat every customer the way they would want to be treated, even if it means ignoring official company rule-book. Employees must bend the rules and make empowered decisions to save customers.

The best news is that most decisions will cost the company less than \$50, which is a pittance when you consider the lifetime value of a customer, and the good will that empowered decisions can make. Every company has something it can give to a customer who experiences a problem. It doesn't have to cost a lot, but its value as far as goodwill and customer loyalty are concerned will be priceless.

Identify 10 to 20 products your company has that have value in the eyes of the customer, but won't cost you an arm and a leg when used as compensation for a problem. For an airline that might be a first-class upgrade, while for a dentist it might be a free cleaning. Redbox gives away two free DVD rentals when there is a problem. Customers will be pleasantly surprised and delighted with your company if you make things right and make things better.

It Serves Everyone to Bend the Rules. Your customer gets what they need and are happy. Your organization strengthens a relationship with a client. The employee is recognized for solving a problem and retaining business.

Remember, just good service doesn't get anyone talking about you. Bend the rules a bit and get them buzzing about you. **SSE**



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