

NEWS

Customer 'disservice' simply drives me mad

HANNA
DUNN

HUMAN CAPITAL



All kinds of companies tout their wonderful customer service practices. They claim that we are their No. 1 priority.

More often than not, I just don't see it. Rudeness is one problem, but frankly, I can live with that.

Although (or maybe because) I work in the Human Resources (HR) field, I have a pretty thick skin. But I do object when a company's customer service failings cut into my leisure time. Today is Friday and I could have taken the day off, but here is what I did instead:

I called a physician whose lab results were delivered by mail to my office instead of his.

Rather than entrust this important piece of mail, which may very well contain serious news for a patient, to Canada Post again for further delay, I thought I would inform the physician's office of the error.

I reasoned that there may well be a guy somewhere waiting for his prostrate exam results or a woman anxious to find out whether she is pregnant.

The receptionist at the doctor's office was rather curt, made me explain three times and finally transferred me to someone else who, after making me explain again, informed me that I'd have to call another number to get my problem resolved.

My next call was to a utility to straighten out an over-billing issue, for which I was kept on hold for 17 minutes. After that, I arranged the return of an incorrectly shipped item resulting from an online purchase.

Then I made what was my third attempt to try to have the phone line removed that has been strung between my house and my neighbour's house for the past 19 months.

Later, I was off to the grocery store to return the six peaches I bought yesterday that are the consistency of a damp bun. I also made a call to a car dealership that I'd had discussions with earlier in the week.

Here is how the phone call went:
Receptionist: Snazzy Car Dealership.
Me: Hi, this is Hanna Dunn, is Mr. Big Cheese in?
She: No.
Me: Do you know when he'll be back?
She: No idea.

Me: Well, is he away or would he be in later today?

She: Don't know.
Me: Alright, I'd like to leave a message. My number is-

Receptionist: It's better if you just call back.
Me: I'd prefer if you could take a message.
She: (Pause) Fine, if I have to!

Me: No, that's OK, we'll buy the car somewhere else.

This afternoon I plan to drive to the mall to return an expensive but flawed piece of furniture and also a pair of brand new pants on which the twice-used zipper will not budge.

I'm quite sure there will be no apology from the store staff. Furthermore, when I thank the store employee for handling my return, she will probably say "not a problem" as they usually do. I'm so glad that my returning their faulty merchandise wasn't a problem for them!

I realize I'm being sarcastic, but is it too much to ask for employees to be more careful and to try to meet the needs of their customers?

Would it be unreasonable to expect an apology from a company that made a mistake or wasted my time (e.g. forcing me to return an item to the store or call them to resolve an error)?

Am I way off in wanting a thank you from someone for whom I did the favour of telling them that their important mail came to my office instead of theirs?

I don't think so, and Scott Deming agrees with me. He has written a book entitled *The Brand Who Cried Wolf: Deliver On Your Company's Promise and Create Customers For Life*.

Deming believes that great customer experiences happen when companies keep their word. In his book he offers insights for companies that include:

- Be careful what you promise so you can exceed customers' expectations.

- Realize that perspective is everything, put yourself in your customers' shoes.

- Face the fact that you (and your brand) are probably not as great as you think. Ask yourself how you can improve on the customer experience.

- Understand your company's "reach of influence" - a happy customer tells one friend about a good experience; an unhappy customer tells ten.

Deming's book includes plenty of case studies and advice for businesses that genuinely want to do a better job in customer service.

Having done an extensive amount of customer service training/consulting myself, I feel qualified to add some of my own insights for companies:

- Hire employees who like people.
- Train staff on how to deal with customers; not just how to do the paperwork.
- Add customer service to the performance appraisal process for employees.
- If the company made a mistake, apologize. Then fix it, cheerfully.
- If you are an 'associate', smile and make eye contact.
- When asking for my money, say please; when making a sale, say thank you.

If you own or manage a business, learn something about customer service.

Pick up a book, Deming's for example, or engage a professional to help.

Your livelihood could depend on it. Look at what happened to a certain car dealer.

Hanna Dunn is president of Dunn & Winfield Group Inc. and has been a Human Resources professional in Mississauga for the past 20 years. Feel free to write to her at: hannad@dunnwinfield.com or visit www.dunnwinfield.com for more information about the HR consulting services of her firm.

Writing 'Credit'



John Bozzo, (left), owner of LaVilla Bakery in Port Credit, and director of the Port Credit BIA, gets a book signed by Author Kathleen Hicks at the Port Credit Library. Hicks recently celebrated the publication of her book "Port Credit: Past to Present", and held a book signing session at the Port Credit Library.

Photo by Stephen Uhraney



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