

# Service and Support

*by Mitch Bryant*



## HDI Focus Series

- Bridging the Gap... to Your Customer  
–Q1 2009
- How to Handle Customer Complaints  
–Q4 2010

– *Mitch Bryant*

## Service and Support

- *It is not enough to have the lowest price or best technology backing you up....*
- *Sooner or later someone will come along and do it cheaper and better than you...*

According to SCORE (Counselors to American Small Businesses) 91 percent of unhappy customers will never purchase goods or services from you again. But if you make an effort to remedy your customer's complaints, 82 to 95 percent of them will stay with you.

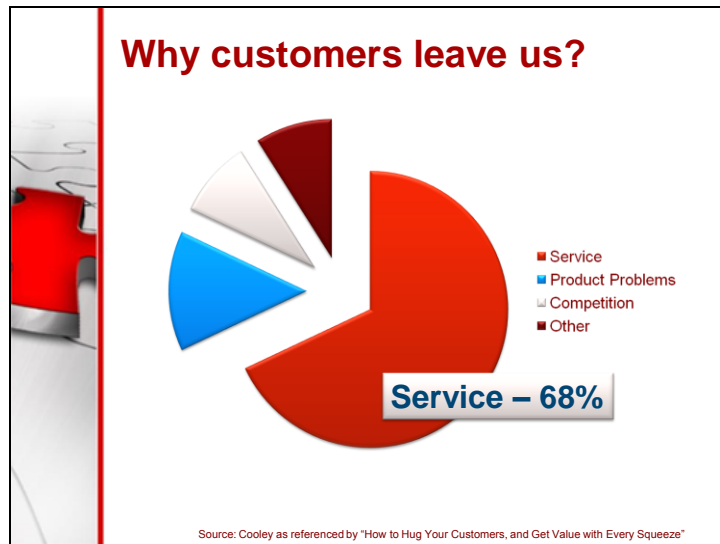
## Your competition



- *It is now **Global!!***

Many customers have turned away from their current service and support providers. The basic reasons are all the same; they have experienced unreliability, poor customer service, excuses upon excuses, no concern for their problem, too much confusing technical jargon, or simply a failure to fix their problems.

Customer service is your company's best commodity. **The customer is the number one reason your company exists.**



According to John Tschohl, president of the Service Quality Institute, "Ninety five percent of all business owners believe that their companies are exceeding customer expectations in terms of service." That, Tschohl says, is far from the truth. Indeed, lousy service and poor communication ranks as one of the top consumer complaints, he adds. In a competitive economy, becoming a customer service leader is one of the least expensive ways of improving performance. In fact, in today's highly competitive business environment, Tschohl calls good customer service "a matter of survival."

#### Have you ever felt this way after a support call?

- I didn't have a clue what they told me.
- They made me feel stupid.
- I don't think they even cared about my issue.
- There's no way they can help me or fix my problem.
- They are the Helpless Desk!
- They used words that sounded like a foreign language to me.

**In the past....**

- *Doctor offices and Hospitals gave Flu Shots*



**2 Years ago....**

- *Hospital offers drive-through flu shots*



**Now.....**



**WAL\*MART**



**The future?**



***Free flu shot with fill-up????***

## In the old days



- **PRIDE** in the service they gave

## Now.....



- Are we removing the “human” element



### Complaint-Handling Checklist

- Do other methods exist for allowing your customer to communicate a complaint?
- Are complaints invited?
- Is the process simple and clear to the customer?
- Are all employees, especially frontline agents, trained in the complaint-handling process?
- Is the customer guaranteed a response?
- If the complaint is received via electronic means, does the customer want a quick reply?
- If the complaint is received via letter, does the person receive a written confirmation in a timely manner?
- Are telephone complaints answered immediately, and can the customer speak to someone directly?




#### HOW TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS “COMPLAINT-FRIENDLY”

- Anticipate complaints.
- Train for complaints.
- Make yourself easy to reach (face-to-face, e-mail, snail mail, telephone, website, etc.).
- Create a complaint-friendly policy for your staff.

Always speak in terms of what you *can do for them, instead of what you can't do*. No one wants to hear, “Wow, sorry you're having a problem, but we really can't do a thing about it.” Own the problem, even if you have to get help. You are the person the customer reported his complaint to, and you are the one who must ensure he is taken care of to the fullest extent and that he is satisfied with the resolution.

Accept responsibility for the issue (even if you are not at fault) and own the problem. If you believe the customer's satisfaction is your responsibility (and it is), you will regard the problem as “ours” instead of “theirs.”



## Timely Confirmations?

- Thank you for contacting the Support Group. We are in receipt of your email and **will respond within 3-5 business days. If you have not heard from us by then please call us directly at (502) 555-5555. We look forward to assisting you with your problem.**

### Response Time

When I call, do I get someone that will listen to me and help me with my complaint?

Is it important to routinely check your accessibility to make certain you are keeping up with the times? Yes.

- How quickly do we respond to our customer? Latency in any response will confirm we aren't committed to resolving the issue. Remember, we live in a world of always-on, instant responses. When a customer sends an e-mail, do we respond with a timeline appropriate to that communication channel?

### Record

- All complaints, no matter how small, should be recorded. Categorize the complaints, but do not make the process tedious or time-consuming, or your employees will likely forgo the process.
- Use a database to collect, categorize, and analyze, so you can fix the root cause. This will allow you to make the best investment to prevent issues.

### Follow Up

- Any follow up has to acknowledge the complaint, resolve the problem, or request more information to get to the resolution.
- Always thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention.

### Closure

- No matter what the issue was, ensure that your customer is happy with the resolution. But, before you close the incident, make sure that it can be closed. Leaving an incident half-open means the problem was not fully resolved.
- Finally, make sure you have encouraged the customer to let you know if they have any other problems. Also, make sure this process has been documented and that you have taken steps toward resolving the root cause, so that the problem does not happen again. At the very least, take away valuable lessons learned for handling this issue in the future.

## Are You Reachable??



We can all remember the days of placing a call to customer service only to hear messages such as “Please call back between our regular business hours of 9 A.M. and 5 P.M., Monday through Friday.” While this level of service was previously acceptable, over the recent years we’ve witnessed a shift in customer needs and demands, drastically changing the quality of service customers expect when contacting organizations. The nature of service and support for a company as a “never closed, always available” demand necessitates a change in the way we respond to our customers.

It’s almost a given nowadays to hear companies say to current and potential customers about how they are number one in service and support. We all wish it was that simple, just have a catchy phrase and it is done. That is far from the truth. Being number one takes a lot of very hard work and constant vigilance to ensure you stay at the top.



## Service Recovery

*“Customers don’t expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong.”*

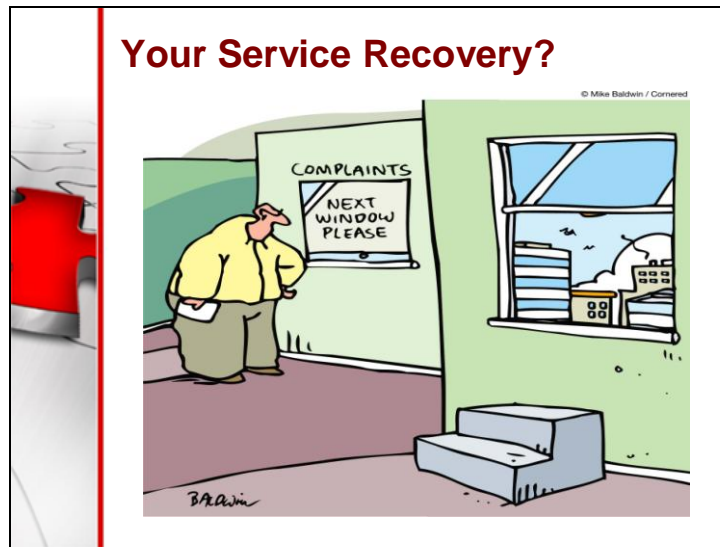
*Donald Porter*

Will you fail your customers occasionally? YES, but how you perform service recovery and how you provide exceptional service day-in and day-out will make or break that relationship.

How many people do you think your customer will tell about their bad experience? EVERYONE! Through an effective customer service recovery intervention program, problems turn into wonderful, very positive, and unexpected “wow” experiences!

Every mistake, every problem, every dissatisfied customer provides a great opportunity for you to intervene and make the issue right and stand out above the rest, period. Service recovery doesn’t just happen; you have to work at it.

There is profit in service recovery; it costs much more to attract a new customer than it does to keep a current one. Each one of your customers has a large circle of influence over people or potential customers who could hear bad things about you!



### Steps to Service Recovery

#### *Apology*

- “I am very sorry that our product didn’t meet your needs.”
- “I am very sorry we did not get that delivered to you when promised.”
- “I am very sorry we did not get your computer fixed in time.”
- “I am very sorry we missed our deadline for getting you back up and running.”

Whose problem is it? Is it your customer’s? Absolutely not! Your product or service didn’t work, so that makes it your problem! It is not

#### *Accountability*

Everyone must take immediate responsibility, and more importantly, everyone must jointly own the customer’s problem. From the manufacturing department and the outsourced vendors to the back-end service team, every step of the way, everyone should share in the recovery. No excuses, no finger-pointing, no “passing the buck.”

#### *Make It Right*

More than anything the customer just wants you to “fix the problem.” Period. Partner with the customer to understand what “making it right” means for them.

#### *“Wow” Them*

It’s time to exceed your customers’ expectations, time to “wow” them. You have apologized. You have taken full responsibility for their/your problem. You have made it right to their satisfaction. Now you have to take it to the next level.

#### *Follow Up*

Follow up is often overlooked, but this is another chance to ensure that your customer is happy. A simple thank you note with your business card in it, thanking them for allowing you to make things right, is worth its weight in gold.



**Cost**

- **1** unresolved complaint
- **They could tell nine to ten people**

TARP Worldwide study

## THE COST OF UNANSWERED COMPLAINTS

A Genesys report entitled “The Cost of Poor Customer Service: The Economic Impact of the Customer Experience,” based on a survey of 8,880 consumers (at least 500 from each country surveyed), representing all ages and income groups, reported these facts:

- More than 65 percent of consumers have ended relationships due to poor customer service.
- Sixty-one percent of those relationships (customers) end up with a competitor, while 39 percent are lost or abandoned completely.
- The average US customer surveyed had eleven interactions each year and ended, on average, 1.2 relationships.

Now factor in the cost of marketing campaigns and employee churn because your customer feels helpless or overwhelmed, and each lost customer is very pricey. Loyal customers are hard (and expensive) to find, but easy to lose.



**More Cost**

- **13 percent of complainers**
- Will tell more than **20**  
**people**

TARP Worldwide study

You must empower every employee to immediately solve a problem and give something of value to a disgruntled customer. It is more cost-effective

The ultimate goal of service recovery is to identify issues, problems, or difficulties with your company's service and then to address those issues to the customers' satisfaction to promote retention. To regain the trust of a dissatisfied customer than to spend advertising dollars looking for new ones.



The power that the service and support team has over the bottom line is measurable in customer loyalty. When your product fails your customer, and it will, how you react and provide service recovery will make all the difference in the world.

Having a good quality product is not enough if the customer doesn't get great customer service to go along with your product. This is the only way to make your customers raving fans. On the opposite end of the spectrum, bad service will cause them to campaign against your product and or business—usually more passionately than if they were happy customers.

Great customer service has to be the focus of everyone within your company, not just the frontline agents. Simply put—great customer service will retain customers and poor customer service drives them away!

## Why low complaints?

- Not worth my time
- No one cares
- They won't listen
- Just easier to go away
- Nothing is going to change

## Complaint

1



An effective complaint-handling policy needs someone in the company to own it and ultimately drive the process. This person must truly understand the importance of complaint-handling and the value of customer service.

- Have a policy that welcomes complaints. All employees must understand why this policy is important and how it works for and the benefits them and the company.
- Have a system for handling complaints effectively. There has to be adequate information available on how your customers can get their problem addressed, especially at the point of sale.
- Have a complaint process for employees. All staff members need to be aware of the policy, know who has the authority to handle/settle them, and know when/from whom they can get assistance.
- Provide training upon hiring and on an ongoing basis.
- Provide a way to deal with complaints immediately.
- Ensure that complaints are recorded in the system for ongoing review.

## Never Heard From

26



We have all experienced it—pre-sale service and promises are amazing, but they can fall short after the fact. Even through the initial honeymoon you may be happy with your service, but as time goes by, your relationship seems to have lost that initial romance. Now you begin to wonder, “Is this even the same company I worked with to initially buy my product and or service?” What the heck happened?

## Serious Complaints

6



**Beware below the surface**



**Cost of complaints**



## The power is theirs

- Complaints/negative comments
- ***One click away***



## Friend or Foe



## The power is global!



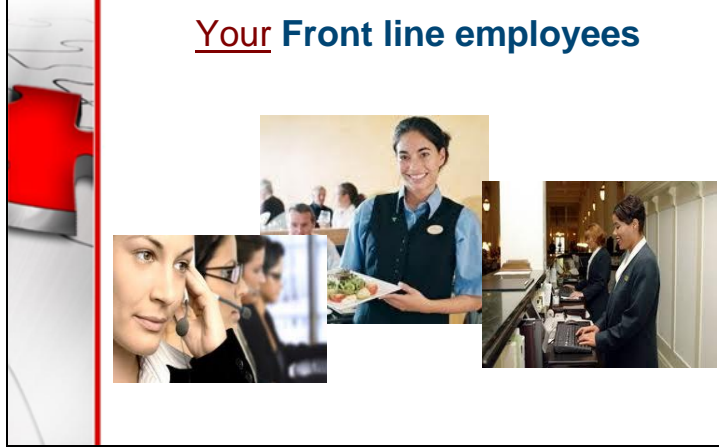
## Agents burnt out?



- Most important asset you have - [period](#)

## Key to success

### Your Front line employees






Training and ongoing education are the most valuable investment you can make for the welfare and success of your business. This is especially true of service and support. Customer service is the most important part of any business. In fact, it is the lifeline of your business. Having the wrong people handling your customer service can destroy your reputation, credibility, and your business very quickly. Untrained employees can cost you dearly, far more than if you had just provided training in the first place.

All employees should receive initial training, which should be repeated often and throughout their tenure. Initial training must not only set the tone of your organization's overall policy, but also ensure that everyone has the same information and understands its importance. This needs to be done as soon as possible when a new employee arrives. Never assume they brought these skills with them. Training must always be seen as an investment in the success of company and its employees, rather than as an expense. Too often there is little or no training, and the training budget is often the first to go in hard times.


Focus on:

- Telephone etiquette
- In-person etiquette
- Trust and building rapport
- Active listening skills
- Asking the right questions
- Proper apologies
- Offering alternatives
- Problem solving
- Defusing anger
- Stress control
  - Who/how to ask for help
  - Product knowledge
  - Escalation procedures
  - Proper documentation of the issue and resolution
  - Managing and setting expectations
  - Outlining the customer's options



## Ongoing Success

- Refresher for **all**



### *Refresher Training*

- Remind agents of their core training (the basics).
- Reinforce training during monthly meetings, team meetings, newsletters, Customer Service Week, etc.
- Leverage new technology, new techniques, new principles, etc.
- Focus on lessons learned from past experiences; reviewing previous interactions will help you understand how you reacted and what you can learn from those interactions. We must learn from our mistakes and understand the feedback we have been given.
- Communicate updates and policy changes. This is an evolving process; never stop improving.

Trained employees take control; they make decisions quickly, and they ensure the customer leaves happy. They take responsibility for the customer's problem because they know how to deal with it.

## Does training matter????



- Not just for front line folks - **EVERYONE**

Jan 2005 - USS San Francisco, struck an uncharted undersea mountain while traveling in the South Pacific at a depth of 500 feet. At the time, apparently, the sub was traveling at almost full speed (35 knots).

## What they need



## Active Listening



### *Listen*

Active listening is one of the most important skills when it comes to delivering great customer service. It is important to understand that everyone puts up listening barriers. Often we are distracted, only half-listening, or maybe thinking about something else,

Active listening will help you avoiding misunderstandings, resolve conflict, and build trust with your customers.

### *Own the Problem*

The issue is your issue, not the customer's. If you believe the customer's satisfaction is your satisfaction (and trust me, it is) you will regard the problem as "yours" instead of "theirs," and that should guide your resolution.

## Speak in their terms

- Thanks for calling the support center how can I help you?
- We have three dead COWS at Audubon hospital
- I am sorry, I do not understand you

## Her Terms vs Mine



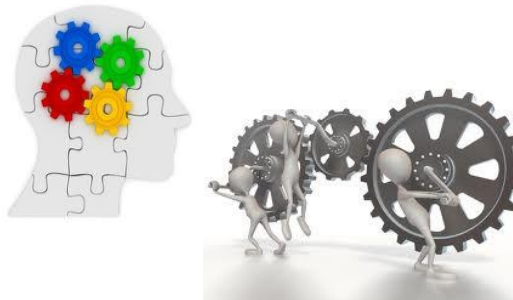
## Empathy



### *Acknowledgement*

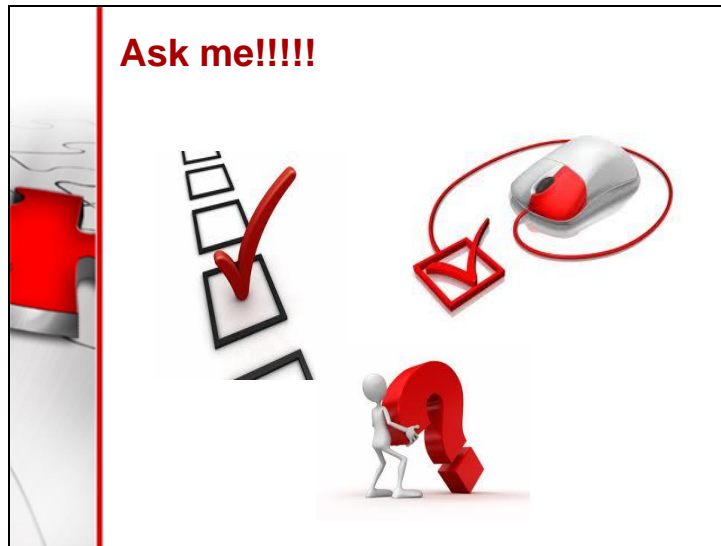
Empathy is the other valuable skill required for handling complaints. The customer has a right to feel the way they do. Your service or product has failed or let them down in some way. Be sure to acknowledge that.

## Understand their business



In today's world, our customers need to know we realize just how much they rely on the technology we support to run their business successfully. They want to know they are dealing with experts who can solve problems quickly, communicate in sensible plain terms, and get them up and running again.

Get to know your customers, develop a relationship. Once you know your customer, you're able to anticipate what will appeal to them and make relevant recommendations.



Surveying your customers and employees will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses. Don't wait for that annual survey to ask both parties how you're organization is doing. Look for trends and try to resolve them as quickly as possible. Too many surveys will overwhelm you and too few surveys will give you little to learn from and can impair your judgment.

Ask yourself what you learned from your most difficult and painful complaints, as well as how you dealt with them (successfully or unsuccessfully). Then, put your plan into action, not only for yourself, but also for the team and the company. Look at what other agents do, as well as what other companies do. When you are on the other side of the counter, how is your interaction handled? How did they handle your complaint? Study your competition, because if you aren't adapting to your customers needs, they are.

**End the end.....**

- You and your fellow employees are the true product!!*

The graphic includes three photographs: a smiling waitress in a blue vest holding a plate of food, a woman in a call center setting with her hand to her ear, and a man in a suit working at a service counter.

## Time is Money



**Thank you!!!**

Well done is better than well said”

*Benjamin Franklin*

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