

Why Not Do What Your Competition Doesn't?

By Joan Fox



In 1906, the forward pass was legalized in football. Up to that time, the game was exclusively physical, and moving the ball on the ground was the

only option. Teams made their way onto the score board, inch by inch, yard by yard, and only rarely would a ball carrier break away from the pack and score a long touchdown.

In 1906, even though the rules had changed, and the teams had the option to pass the ball, they still made their way onto the scoreboard, inch by inch, and yard by yard. Only one team utilized the new offensive tool that year. That team was St. Louis University and they out scored their opponents by a score of 402-11.

Looking back, it's easy for us to ask, "How stupid were these teams anyway?" Can you imagine having an incredible advantage at your fingertips and not using it?

There is an evident analogy here for us. Advantages that are clear and workable for a few are often deemed as useless and unworkable by many others. And, the message is evident too. In the midst of ongoing, positive change, it is a disadvantage to remain the same.

Today, satisfying the customer offers the same competitive advantages as the 1906 pass innovation. You see,

we've talked about it, written about it, espoused it, and advocated it from the roof tops.

We've delivered seminars, keynote speeches, and workshops on customer service. We've put it in our mission statements, company slogans, and on our letterheads. It's in our annual reports and it holds the floor at our company retreats. It's certain we've given customer service "lip service" aplenty. But, we still don't have it. We still don't get it.

After all of this, an excellent service experience still remains an anomaly, an oasis in a barren desert.

I often find myself asking WHY? Why, with all of the education and awareness of our modern society, are we still treating customers with indifference, lack of empathy, or even disdain? I have an idea as to why this phenomenon exists, which will be shared in a future article. For now, let's keep our focus on why it makes good business sense to be good to our customers.

Excellent Service is Good Business

Clearly, the most dangerous position to take is that customer service is a fad, and that "this too will pass." Today's consumer is more educated and aware than ever before. Business will go where it is wanted.

The research company formerly TARP,

now E-Satisfy, has provided us with data that has profound implications for our businesses. In a comprehensive research study they discovered that an average unhappy customer will tell 10-14 other people about his or her experience.

Not long ago, I was at a fast food restaurant and accidentally spilled my cola all over the counter as I picked it

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up. I immediately apologized as the service worker behind the counter looked at me as if I had two heads. She said nothing as I continued to apologize and began to clean up the spill. Finally, and in a very disgusted voice she asked if I wanted a

refill. I replied in the affirmative. She refilled, handed off to me, and followed through with her now familiar silence. I walked away a bit embarrassed and a bit upset with the employee. She had the interpersonal communication skills of a slug. It would have been so simple to shelter me, the customer, from embarrassment over my clumsiness. If only she would have offered a meager reply of, "Oh, don't worry about that. It's no big deal. Let me get you another drink." It's not too tough. It's a 'no brainer'.

Because I speak on customer service, I've told more than my quota of 10 to 14 people about this incident, usually including the company name.



E-Satisfy goes on to say that some of this bad news is carried over a period of 23½ years. In other words, poor customer service leaves a bad taste for a long time.

Another disturbing fact is that 96 percent of these displeased customers complain to other people and not to the company or the person with whom they are dissatisfied.

This shouldn't be a shock. After all, people have been conditioned to believe that their complaints either fall on deaf ears, or ears connected to human beings that couldn't care less about their problems. Besides that, it takes time and energy to complain. Why have a bad day if no one cares anyway?

This leaves a measly 4 percent who will actually tell us they are unhappy. Thus, when we receive negative input from a customer it is truly a blessing in disguise. It is extremely valuable information.

Many companies hire organizations to assess the quality of their customer service. If a system is in place to acquire and utilize customer feedback,

our customer base can perform this consultative function for us.

The research also tells us that our satisfied customers will tell a mere 4 people over a period of 18 months. In other words, those individuals who are outrageously happy with us, our companies, the processes we

have in place to serve them, just everything about us — those who we thought were shouting our praises to everyone they meet — yes those people are telling only 4 others. It's short lived news too — a year and a half. Yes, the scales are tipped. It's not

fair. It just is.

Other research tells us that it costs the average company 3-5 times as much to gain a new customer, as it does to retain an old one. It is difficult to overlook the tremendous waste of time and effort this statistic represents.

The case for maximizing the satisfaction of our customers is a strong one. A customer base built on trust, quality service, and product excellence, will be with us as long as we are with them.

Changing our focus to customer service

is easier to talk about than to actually do. Our everyday work habits dictate the routines of our lives which are not easily changed. Although difficult, it is imperative that we re-examine customer related processes and policies, re-focus, and re-commit to our customers.

The sooner we accomplish this, the sooner we can start scoring touchdowns.

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