

Do You Give Your Customers the Benefit of the Doubt?

by Deborah Chaddock Brown

I just came home from watching what will surely be another Oscar nomination for Meryl Streep in Doubt. The movie tells the story of a Nun/principal of a Catholic school who suspects the Priest (Philip Seymour Hoffman) of improper relations with a twelve year old African America student.

There isn't any real proof, however, the Nun calls on her past experience and her observations and believes with "certainty!" her claims. Justification and explanation is shared from both sides of the story and you'll have to see the movie to come to your own conclusions, however, it brought to mind how we may occasionally view our customers.

When a customer returns with an issue, a return or an exchange of the product, do we seek to help or do we cross examine them for proof?

If the receipt is missing do we make the customer jump through hoops or take their word?

If the service is less than acceptable and a refund is requested, do we try to justify the experience or do we apologize and set about making it right?

I received two DVDs for Christmas that I already owned. I learned from the giver that they came from a chain store and so I went to exchange them. The sign behind the Customer Service desk boldly informed me that without a receipt I was out of luck.

"These were gifts," I explained.

"But you need a receipt," the clerk informed me.

"I didn't purchase them and so I don't have the receipt," I explained.

"No receipt, no refund," she said.

"I would just like to exchange them. I'm not looking for cash and they haven't been opened," I insisted, pointing to the two, unopened DVDs.

A manager had to be called to settle the matter.

"Oh, yeah. Joe said this would happen," she told the clerk. (Joe must have been a District Manager.) "Just give her a gift card."

The manager never looked at me, never acknowledged my presence.

The clerk huffed and puffed and struggled with the cash register until the manager had to be called again.

I was a distraction. I was a trouble maker. I was being difficult. Or so I felt.

As it happened, I had additional purchases to make and in fact spent more than the gift card with my two replacement movies and Wii game for my brother's birthday.

However, I didn't feel good about my purchase.

They didn't give me the benefit of doubt.

I had to work to exchange the product.

I had to work to be a paying customer.

I won't be back.

Do you make your customers jump through hoops to do business with you or do you give them the benefit of doubt and work to make their experience a satisfactory one?

HAPPY NEW YEAR

The sliding economy of 2008 is behind us and hopefully by the end of 2009 we'll see a reversal in the trend. In the meantime, refocusing our efforts on customer service should be our number one priority.

Customers have tons of choices when it comes to making a purchase and they aren't going to settle for less than satisfactory service. If ever the customer came first – it is now!

What are you doing to provide customer service training for your employees?

The key to earning our customer's loyalty is by showing an interest in developing a relationship with them. The first step in building that relationship is by exceeding their expectations.

We all have expectations based on our prior experiences. Whether we know it or not, before we walk into a store, doctor's office or office we have certain expectations. We prepare for them. We might take a book to the doctor's because we know we always have to wait.

What expectations do your customers have of their experience with you? What process do you have in place to ensure that your employees exceed those expectations? Do you have a method of measuring your success?

I would invite you to visit Make or Break Moments, a customer service blog that shares stories, techniques and tips for improving your customer experience and building customer relationships.

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