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Whose Reality is the Truth?

by Deborah Chaddock Brown

Last month I overheard a conversation between a customer and a sales person. The customer wanted a refund for a product and the sales associate was explaining that the company policy dictated that a check would be sent to the customer's home.

The customer was upset. The employee's response?

"Did you read your receipt? It clearly states that you'll receive a check. I don't write the check, the office does and unless you live out in the country, you'll have it in two days."

The customer had hoped to receive the refund in the store. The employee's response?

"Did you not hear me explain the policy? I don't make the policy; I'm just explaining the policy. You'll get a check. You'll get your refund. What part of the policy do you not understand?"

If we were to talk to each person separately, how would they recount the incident? The TRUTH, from the sales person's perspective, might sound something like this:

"I have no clue why the customer got upset. He wanted a refund and we are giving him a refund. What more did he want?"

What might the TRUTH be from the customer's perspective?

"I have never been so insulted in all my life. There is no way I'll ever go back to that store. I returned a shirt because it didn't fit and I wanted a refund. Businesses give refunds all the time. I returned the product, why can't I have my money?"

In an instant this sales person turned what could have been a customer for life into the biggest negative marketing tool the store could possibly have: a dissatisfied customer.

These moments of truth speak to the PERCEPTION of those involved in the conversation. Reality is irrelevant. All that matters is the perception or the feeling with which the customer is left.

How can you close the gap between the customer's reality and yours?

- Remember they come to the conversation with other baggage that could color their response.
- Listen closely to what the customer isn't saying, respond to more than just their words.
- Put yourself in their shoes. In the circumstance I witnessed, the customer may have needed or even counted on the cash for another more immediate need.
- Being right can most often be wrong.
- Ask more questions than you give answers; it will help you uncover the true issue.

In this competitive environment our customers have so many choices available to them. By truly listening and understanding the needs of our customers, especially when they are unhappy, helps build a relationship which leads to customer loyalty.

The old adage "the customer is always right" isn't necessarily true, however, their perception of the situation is always the truth!

Looking for a speaker for your next meeting? I'd love to help. My speech on Earning Customer Loyalty provides three areas you can focus on today to begin to build that relationship.

Customer vs. Company

Speaking of putting yourself in your customer's shoes – how does your web content stack up? When visitors read your web content is it all about YOU?

We've been in business 30 years and offer the best quality services and products around.

Or is it all about THEM?

Looking to increase profits? Have you struggled to build a cohesive sales team? We can help.

Future Now offers a Customer Calculator. Input the address for your site and it will provide a summary of how often your words speak to the customer vs. speaking about you.

You Have to Check Out Twitter

I know it is a weird name. I know it seems inane to expect someone to care "What are you doing right now?" However, Twitter has now moved to the number TWO spot in the list of most effective ways to reach your target audience followed behind acquiring their email address. NUMBER TWO. Can you really afford to ignore this fast growing social media vehicle?

In LinkedIn recently the question was asked "How do you use Twitter to benefit your marketing efforts." The answers are worth reading.

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