

## Win the Battle, Lose the War

Dealing with customer concerns, problems and issues is a fact of life when you sell a product or service. And every person in sales has to certain customers who are more challenging to deal with. Some situations start as minor difficulties but quickly escalate into huge drawn-out battles. Unfortunately, many sales people unknowingly cause situations to escalate. Here is what I mean.

My wife overheard a conversation in a local grocery customer even though the customer's original concern was well-handled and properly taken care of. From what my wife could gather, the customer had bought some fruit (seven plums) that were not to her satisfaction. She wanted to exchange them and the "customer service" person told her to get the replacement plum and verify them her with before leaving the store. The customer did so. End of story. Problem solved. Quickly, easily and without hassle.

Well, not quite.

You see, as the store employee bagged the new plums she said a condescending tone, "You know...normally, we charge for the difference in price. So you're lucky today." I guess she was assuming that the weight of the customer's new plums weighed more than the returned ones or perhaps the price had increased since the original purchase. As you can well imagine, this did not go over well with the customer. She immediately exploded, "I should be happy? You should be paying me for my time and trouble and be happy that I'm not shopping at your competition. In fact, based on your tone with me, I will go to your competitor's." And she stormed out of the store.

It was obvious to my wife that the customer service person made an unnecessary comment. The interesting thing is that this occurs more frequently than people think. Too many sales people feel that they have to point out a customer's mistake or get in the last word to show the customer how much effort went into solving the problem. But your customer doesn't care about that!

If the problem was caused by you, someone in the company, or a defective product, it was your fault! And if the situation is your fault then you owe it your customer to solve it quickly and without hassle. They don't need to know why the problem occurred or how difficult it may be to resolve. They just want a solution. Here is an example,

We used to buy two to four cappuccinos per day from a well-known coffee chain and the barista frequently added too much milk for our liking. When we questioned how the coffee was made we usually got a response like this, "Oh, it's made properly, you just want a dry cappuccino."

No, we didn't because a dry cappuccino does not have enough milk. Because of the hassle, we invested in a cappuccino machine and now make our own.

From time-to-time, I get calls and emails from people who order my audio CD's. While I take great pains to ensure high-quality, sometimes the sound quality is less than perfect or the CD simply does not play. When someone contacts my office, we do not challenge them or ask them twenty questions before we issue a replacement. We send out a new item that day.

This may sound like a simple concept to apply. However, the challenge is your ego. Most people feel the pressing need to get in the last word. They want to make it clear to the other person where that individual went wrong because it helps them feel less taken advantage of. Many sales people have large egos. After all, this helps deal with the rejection and challenging customers. However, it is critical to recognize that these situations are not about you. They are about helping one of your customers get what they want and resolving their problems.

Behaving in a manner similar to one described above may make you feel better and lessen the pain of dealing with a challenging customer. But let's look at the financial impact for a moment. The comment from the baristas at the coffee chain caused us to buy our own machine which represents a financial loss of fifteen to twenty dollars per day for that particular coffee store. That's \$5400-\$7300 in lost revenue every year for that store!

Here is the bottom line. Getting in your last words may help you win the battle. However, even if you do win the battle, there is a good chance you will lose the war. That means your customer will find a reason to jump ship and shift their business to one of your competitors. Are a few last words that make you feel better worth that loss?

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