

If Only Someone Would Listen

Isn't it interesting how our perspective changes when we're the unhappy customer? We've all been consumers who have experienced either a business or a product that has failed to meet our expectations and we just want someone to make it right. We're unhappy and we want a solution we believe is fair and reasonable. Unfortunately, time and again we seem to encounter unresponsive and/or uncaring employees who have evidently made it their life mission to make your life more difficult. And you think to yourself, "if only someone would listen!"

Right there in that desire to be heard is the key to your happiness as a customer and your success as a retailer. When customers stop doing business with a company it's frequently not because they didn't like what they heard. Often it's because they don't think anybody's even listening to them. Most unhappy customers are reasonable once they feel that the company representative they are talking to understands the problem and is interested in finding a solution that works for both parties. When you're working with an unhappy customer it's important to let them vent their frustrations and tell their story. Once that happens you can take the lead and transition to the solution.

The secret to the transition, and to making an unhappy customer happy, is really quite simple. After hearing the customer's story, take a moment to acknowledge their feelings. This not only lets the customer know you've heard what they said but also tells them that you empathize. This acknowledgement does wonders for taking the emotions out of the situation. It strengthens the relationship between the customer and the company because the customer knows that someone understands their issue. Knowing this, they most likely are ready to move on to a solution.

Some examples of how to empathize with the customer include:

"That must have been incredibly frustrating."

"I can sure understand why you're so unhappy."

"I would be frustrated, too."

Then follow the acknowledgement with a transition statement.

"Well let's see what we can do to make it better."

"I'm sure together we can fix this."

Two key points:

- Retailers often confuse acknowledging feelings with admitting wrong. We're acknowledging how the customer feels, not that anyone is wrong. This is not about apportioning blame.

- Try to use the word “we” rather than “I.” It acknowledges to the customer they are an active participant in the solution.

This method of acknowledging the customer’s feelings and transitioning to the solution is a surefire way to turn unhappy customers into raving advocates.

About the author: Doug Fleener is a veteran retailer with over 30 years of hands-on retail experience with world-class retailers including Bose Corporation and The Sharper Image. He has also owned and operated his own specialty stores. As the Director of Retail for Bose Corporation, Doug was instrumental in developing the unique and engaging retail methods that have become the industry's benchmarks for experience based retailing and superb customer service.

Doug is now president and managing partner of Dynamic Experiences Group LLC, a Lexington based retail consulting firm dedicated to helping retailers create unique customer experiences that results in higher sales and profits. Learn more at www.dynamicexperiencesgroup.com or call Doug at 866-535-6331.

Fleener also shares his knowledge of experience based retailing in a series of custom key notes and workshops designed for stores, businesses, corporations, non-profits, and trade associations of all sizes. His casual style and quick wit make him not just a crowd pleaser but also an incredible motivator, encouraging people to take action and deliver extraordinary experiences to customers and employees alike. Learn more at www.dougfleener.com.