

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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Duuuh! How To Address Stupid Customer Questions

The cast members at Walt Disney World in Florida are asked thousands of questions each day. “Which rides have longer wait times in the afternoons?” “When does the park open tomorrow?” “Where’s the bathroom?” and others.

Some of them are a little bit strange. One of the most frequently-asked questions at Disney is, “What time is the 3:00 parade?”

Now, if you were a Disney employee, how would you be tempted to answer that?

“Duuuh! I’m going out on a limb here, but I think the 3 o’clock parade starts at 3.”

Of course, Walt Disney’s crew is trained to answer it a little differently: “Well, the parade usually starts on time, but it’s best to get a seat about 20 minutes early. Would you like to know where some of the best spots are to watch the parade?”

By answering in this way, the Disney cast member added value to the guest’s visit. In fact, he or she made them feel like their question was a very intelligent thing to ask! Not only do they now know what time the parade begins, they also know how they can make the most of their parade experience.

What would happen at your company if someone were to ask a question like that?

Would your team members roll their eyes? Would they laugh and give some snide remark? Would they huff and puff like they were being bothered?

It’s important to train your people that anytime someone asks a question, it’s mainly because they honestly need the information. We can’t afford to make anyone feel stupid, no matter how odd their question is.

Here’s a valuable exercise you can do with your team: Ask them to pair off into groups of two, and ask each twosome to write down their most frequently-asked questions, either from customers or co-workers. Once their list is completed, read each of the answers out loud to the entire group.

Their answers may surprise you.

Some of the questions may have to do with processes that need to change. Some may be about things that are confusing to others, like how to read your invoices. Still others are wayfinding questions, like where a certain item can be found.

Talk with your team about why someone might have that question, and what would need to change in order to help make that question go away.

For the others, come up with “value-added” answers that the entire team can learn and use. If someone asks for a particular item, perhaps your team could be trained to show them where it is, and along the way ask the customer “What will you be needing it for?”

Never, ever make someone feel badly for asking a question. Regardless of how it’s asked, your kindergarten teacher was right: There is no such thing as a stupid question.

There are only stupid answers.

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