

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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What's Your "Policy"?

The call comes in.

It's an order for a lunch pick-up. Four sandwich combo meals.

No problem, the girl says. It'll be ready when you get here.

The customer arrives at the right time. Yes, the sandwich order is ready. Yes, the customer is ready to pay. The bags are prepared and on the counter. So far, so good.

He hands her a \$20 bill, along with a Free Lunch card that he happened to win from a local radio station.

Oops. She's not expecting this. The customer service train wreck is about to begin.

"You can't use this today. You have to tell us you have it on the phone when you place your order."

The customer is confused. He isn't aware of such a requirement. All he knows is that he has a \$20 bill and a Free Lunch card.

"Sorry, you can't use it today. Your total is \$24.14."

The customer has no other money. He has a \$20 bill and a Free Lunch card. He asks her if there's anything that can be done.

Heavy sigh of exasperation. "It's our policy. Look, those are the rules. Your lunch will be \$24.14."

\$20 bill. Free Lunch card. That's all he's got.

He tells her that he can either walk out with no lunch, a \$20 bill and a Free Lunch card from their establishment, or, preferably, something can be worked out.

Heavy sigh #2. Rolling of the eyes. Cold stare for 3 full seconds. Response, with attitude: "Well, I guess I could void it out and start over."

I would appreciate that, he says. What he's really thinking is why she didn't offer that option in the first place.

True story. Local business. Local customer. Local train wreck.

How quickly do you suppose our customer will want to return to this place?

The proper response to this situation, by the way, is to let the customer know that you don't normally do this, but you can take their Free Lunch card today. In the future, when the customer has another one of these, you would simply ask that he let us know when he makes the call, so that you don't ring it up incorrectly and inconvenience him on his next visit.

Notice the different tone. It actually shows the customer that you can fix the problem, and that you've set him up with information that will help to assure a more positive transaction on his next visit. Because, of course, we expect that our service and our product will be good enough for our customer to want to return again and again.

Have you ever been served by someone who didn't seem to want you to come back again?

Every team member that works with the public, whether on the phone or in person, should understand these few simple principles of service:

- Paychecks don't come from the owner. They come from customers.
- Customers are the ones that keep us fed. If something can be done within reason to make a customer happy, it should be done with a smile and appreciation.
- Customers are not an inconvenience. They are the reason we're here.
- It should be obvious to customers that we enjoy serving them. We should do whatever we can do to show our enthusiasm for them and our ability to satisfy their needs.
- When a problem happens, we should do everything we can to fix the situation right away, because every one of our customers represents the future of our business.
- Without great service today, there will be no customers tomorrow.

What can you do as a team member to bring this kind of positive vibe to your workplace?

If you agree with the principles above, share them with your team. Cut this article out and discuss it with them. Decide as a team how you will serve others greatly with each and every opportunity. Avoid hiding behind things like "policies", "the boss", and "that's the way we've always done it".

Because that same customer is going to call YOU tomorrow.

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