

PAMPHLET 43

DOES ANYONE CARE ABOUT THE CUSTOMER?

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Do you care enough about doing something so wonderful and unexpected for customers that you're willing to put your comfy job on the line?

Gary Hamel
Leading the Revolution

I wanted to do everything right. I telephoned the cable television and high-speed Internet provider two weeks before the day I would move. I gave the woman my moving date. She transferred me to the high-speed Internet number so I could cancel that service. The man said, "If you put the order in through me, they will screw up your service between now and the effective date." He said I should disconnect the modem on the date I wanted to stop my service and take it to the local branch office. That would cancel my service.

Forewarned, I wrote a letter to the company asking them to discontinue my service on the effective date. On my moving day I took the modem, two remote controls, and the cable boxes to the local office and turned them in.

Shortly after arriving at my new home I received a bill from this company. The bill was for the month after I moved. I sent a message to the anonymous email address on the bill. A couple of days later I received a response saying I would get a revised bill. That same day I received a late notice for the bill. I called the accounting department (and paid the long distance charge). The woman said I owed a different amount. I paid the bill over the phone via credit card. She said my account was settled.

A couple of weeks later I received another bill for yet another amount. I wrote again to the anonymous email address and asked

for the name and address of the person in charge of that company in Minneapolis so I could write to that person and tell of my experience with this organization. I did not receive a response. I telephoned several phone numbers on the bill trying to get the name of an executive to write to. I ran out of patience with the busy lines with the voice that told me I was appreciated. I gave up and wrote to an anonymous customer service address.

I wanted to do everything right. I read the trailer rental company's materials carefully. I went to the local lot and reserved a trailer and paid my deposit. The agreement said the company would contact me a few days before the date to tell me where and when to pick up the trailer--no one called.

I telephoned the local trailer lot on the day of my move. They said the trailer was ready, and I could come and get it. When I arrived the attendant looked at me and said the trailer had an electrical problem. He said defensively, "we don't guarantee time or location" and walked away. He made no effort to help me. I went home and began calling other lots. An hour later I called the place back. A different person answered. He said, "Give me 10 minutes." I called back, and he had a trailer for me. I drove to another town and picked it up. I was lucky; I only lost four hours.

I wanted to do everything right. I contacted the telephone provider in my new community. People on the phone were friendly and helpful. I ordered two lines and some added services. They told me the date the service would be installed. They said someone would have to be home. I arranged for someone to take a day off work and be at my new home. No one showed up and no one called.

The telephone company has to lay new cable, and they don't know when it will be done--it might be years. They gave me a "customer care" person somewhere in Nebraska. So far I have had 4 customer care people assigned to me. Most don't return calls. They are nice when they do.

They gave me an extension number for each customer care person. Each time I telephoned, I got a voice response that said the extension was invalid. Finally I called a different number and talked to someone about this. He said that if the customer doesn't punch in the extension number within 6 seconds you get that response. I suggested they share that information with callers. As of today, they have not fixed the system and they do not advise the caller that they have six seconds to enter the number.

I wanted to add a satellite dish to my residence. Many frustrating hours were spent on the telephone trying to arrange for this service. The customer service people were in an unknown remote location far from my new community. Service representatives have numbers--not names. They won't tell customers who they are. They won't tell callers who the executives for the company are. I wonder why they won't at least provide their first names and the names of top executives?

After about a month an installer came. He had trouble seeing how to do the wiring. A friend talked him through it in such a way that he thought he did it on his own. He left feeling good about himself. My friend provided him two hours of coaching so he could get the job done.

I telephoned a local provider of wireless Internet service to order their service. A man called back three weeks later. I signed up with another local provider. The service representative gave me a long distance access number by mistake. I received a first month bill of \$321.00 for Internet access with another bill to come. They did agree to reimburse me.

I contacted a well-known investment company to change my address. No one could figure out how to make the address change. I suggested they move my money to a new account at my new address. The service representative knew how to do that. The online postage provider couldn't figure out how to change my address. I cancelled my account with them. The account was not cancelled. The photography magazine can't seem to figure out how to change an address. Neither can a bank I do business with.

An attorney handled a legal process recently. It took twice as long and cost twice as much as she said it would, and the work was sloppy. I paid \$225.00 an hour for lousy performance.

The man who handled my investments made many simple mistakes on several easy projects and failed to mention important rules about various financial transactions. I refused to pay for his services.

The thinking of the people in these stories is of limits, the words are of what they cannot do, and the actions are defensive. Training appears virtually nonexistent, and skills are mediocre. What is present in these stories is futility, non-caring, abdicated leadership,

sleepwalking employees, and rigid literal and linear thinking. What is missing in these stories is empathy, creativity, initiative, commitment, responsibility, and accountability.

Does anyone care about the customer? I believe that most service employees do care. I think most in many organizations are just too tired, too angry, too scared, and too alienated as they work harder and harder, run faster and faster, and fall farther and farther behind. They are trapped in a system of thought that cannot solve the problems it created. Leaders and employees created these realities. They can change the stories if they have the courage to take the necessary actions for it is fear that prevents these people and organizations from realizing their highest potential.

As for me, I finally surrendered to the reality of these systems I must interact with. Anger and outrage will not serve me well. I selected three of these enterprises to confront. I will do so politely with humor, interest, and curiosity. I will not pay their bills. I will calmly hold the mirror in front of their eyes and give them feedback as to how they impact their customers. I will gently challenge any defensive reactions and resist efforts to shift their problems to me. I will offer to help them. I will use their system to hold them accountable. I will observe and study their reactions. I will search for signs of sanity in their insane world. I hope they surprise me.

I spent some time at a major hotel. My expectations were low. My reservation went smoothly. I made some special requests; they were handled perfectly. Employees smiled and were helpful to guests. The man who answered my call for room service knew my name and said I could have both black and green olives. They could be spread over the pizza anyway I wanted them. I was impressed. He was flexible, friendly, and accommodating. He even called back later to ask if everything was okay.

When I checked out. I told the clerk how good it felt to stay there. She was pleased. She said, "We are the top rated hotel in the region. We have good leadership. We are empowered to serve our customers. We like working here."

Customer service is that easy and it doesn't require putting your job on the line.