

PAMPHLET 57

SOMEONE DOES CARE ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

**By Tom Heuerman, Ph.D.
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In Pamphlet 43 I asked, “Does Anyone Care About the Customer?” In that Pamphlet I told just a few of the horrible stories of horrendous customer service I experienced during my move from Minneapolis, Minnesota to Ridgway, Colorado early in 2001.

From trailer rentals, to the printer, to my attorney, to the cable service, to the satellite provider, to insurance companies, to investment companies, to just about everything else, customer service was deplorable. Simple address changes could not be made without multiple requests. Installers did not know how to install. Trailers were not where they were supposed to be. Business cards were printed incorrectly. And then there is Qwest.

I don't normally identify companies. I feel it gets in the way of the larger points I try to make in my Pamphlets. But I make an exception for Qwest. After 14 months of banging my head against the wall, I determined that Qwest is, without doubt, the worst company I have ever worked with, been a customer of, and heard about when it comes to customer service.

I am sorry in advance. I also don't normally criticize front line employees. Usually I consider them victims of lousy leadership (which Qwest has). But, again, I make an exception for Qwest. Even the most poorly led employee can care about the customer. They can return phone calls. They can respond to letters. They can listen to the customer. They can say, “I don't know, but I will stick with you and get the answer.”

The front-line employees that I encountered at Qwest did none of those things. They function like the walking dead who sit blindly and mindlessly in front of their computers and solve only the one or two most common problems that they encounter each day. Give them something that would make them think and they blow you off, send you elsewhere, or blame you for the problem. One, not knowing

what else to do, called me a liar.

They are not systems thinkers: when they do try to fix something, they cause three more problems. If you are a competitor of Qwest and want a competitive advantage, hire caring, curious and competent people to staff your telephones and customer care center. When dealing with Qwest, I don't want to talk to a real, live person.

I didn't give up. As I was about to drive to Denver and camp out in the CEO's office, I found a kind lady name Sharon (on the CEO's staff) who helped me. But even as she took care of things, the people she called on within Qwest continued to mess things up.

You will understand that I approached my move from Ridgway to Fargo, North Dakota in February, 2002 with trepidation. Could I cope with another round of "stops and starts?" Would I be able to get there at all? Once there would I be able to set up my business? Would I be able to talk on the phone, watch television, or go on the internet? Most already consider Fargo to be at or near the end of the earth. How bad would it be?

I picked up the rental trailer in Montrose, Colorado. The nice man hooked it up to my jeep for me. It was snowing that day. I drove 30 miles back to Ridgway to load the trailer. When I got there, I discovered that he left the trailer door open. The trailer was filled with snow, slush, and other stuff. He also forgot to give me the dozen pads I ordered. I was not off to a good start.

I got loaded, got out of town, and got over Monarch Pass before the next snow storm moved in. After that it was smooth sailing toward the edge of the world. I arrived on time and walked through my new town house in Fargo. A few things needed fixing. When I returned at 9:00AM the next morning to unload, they were fixed. I was impressed.

The cable television guys were supposed to come between 3 and 5PM. They were a little early, hooked up the television and the high-speed internet and it all worked. The bed was supposed to be delivered between 3 and 5PM also. They came about 4PM. I was weeks ahead of my anticipated schedule.

My new kitchen table and chairs were waiting at the furniture store as promised. When I offered to buy a recliner if I could take it right off the showroom floor, they had a guy come and carry it to my jeep. I was on a roll.

I went to the bank and my new checks arrived in three days. They even got the new address right. My business cards, stationary, and envelopes were done correctly and sooner than promised. The rubber stamp with my return address was in my mail box early with a handwritten note of apology for not being earlier. Things are different at the edge of the world.

Finally I had a problem. I feared it would happen. I put out my first Pamphlet on my new internet service. I always had a problem of some kind when I put the first Pamphlet out with a new internet service provider. I called the technical hotline. The woman was nice. She said write an email because the guy who could solve my problem works days. I wrote the email. I got a response that didn't help me with my problem. I went to the provider's web site. It said I could write to the general manager. So I wrote to the general manager. I never thought I would get a response.

I went out for an hour and when I got back I had a voice mail message from the local general manager. He committed to solving my problem and gave me his phone number to call if service wasn't satisfactory. He reminded me of me when I was in the newspaper circulation business.

I went into my office and had an email from the customer service manager in Phoenix. He also assured me that he would get back to me soon. He called within 48 hours; we brainstormed the issue, and resolved it.

These men made my day. They made my week. The general manager of the company called me. I couldn't believe it. I was amazed. He then got action. I was even more astounded. The person who helped me actually knew something about what he was doing. He wasn't afraid to say he didn't know something and then went and asked someone else for some information.

I am one happy customer and will tell everyone that Scott with Cableone.net in Fargo and Joe with Cableone.net in Phoenix are my customer service heroes for the week—in fact, they are the heroes of my last several years of lousy customer service.

I went to my mailbox feeling good about things. The shadow side of customer service waited for me there in the form of a bill from Qwest. It was for the line I never had in Colorado, for a time period after I had cancelled the line I never had in Colorado. I called billing and the guy got flustered and called me a liar when I said I had

cancelled the nonexistent service effective about 6 weeks ago.

He asked if I wanted to talk to a supervisor. I said no, I would call the nice lady named Sharon in the CEO's office in Denver. I did and she laughed—a kind of verbal shaking of her head--as I described the situation. She cancelled the bill and made sure the account was cancelled. I am tempted to give out her name and number, but I won't. She doesn't deserve what would happen.

I would love to do a customer service assessment at Qwest.

My plea to service providers:

All I ask of you, whether front-line or in the CEO's office, is that you care. I don't mind if you make a mistake. It's okay if you don't know the answer to a question. You can get back to me later. I just want you to stick with me until the problem is resolved. I want you to listen to me, return my phone calls, and answer my letters. I want you to respect me.

If you treat me with indifference or insolence, I will get determined and never go away, and I will tell everyone I can about how bad you are. If you care and stick with me until we solve the problem, I will go away happy, and I will tell everyone I can about how happy you made me. If you respect and care about the customer, you will change the world.

Fargo, North Dakota may be near the edge of the world, but it has the best overall and most consistent customer service that I have experienced anywhere in my life.