

Firing Customers

© Copyright 2008 Wayne Hogue <http://www.bayoutstyle.com>

Nobody likes bad customer service, yet we're all regularly subjected to it. Ask 100 people and 100% will likely have a horror story... even perpetrators from other stories will have their own!

Customers today are more demanding, vocal, and powerful than ever. On the internet, an unhappy customer can complain to countless folks, and a complaint can remain accessible forever. Want to find out the down side to just about anything? Google it. You can bet that somebody has a negative opinion and it's posted on a website somewhere.

Thankfully, the repercussions of bad customer service are growing, but just like competition fosters efficiency, public airing of poor customer service fosters better customer service.

Then again... there are two sides to every customer service interaction, and sometimes the fault does not lie with the business. Every business or organization has problem, low or no profit, or just plain bad customers that should, for lack of a better phrase, be fired.

Pareto's Principle, the 80/20 Rule, also applies to bad customers. In this case, the rule says that 80% of the problems come from 20% of the customers. It's probably closer to 95-99% of the problems come from 1-5% of the really bad customers.

This firing suggestion may seem radical and disturbing to some (especially that 1-5%) because everyone knows the golden rule: "The Customer Is Always Right." The rule is still golden; however, if a customer is indeed wrong, especially repeatedly, the rule does not apply to them anymore.

Good, profitable customers are always right... or at least treated like they are always right.

Problem customers drain profits because they are more labor intensive, slower paying, or prone to deceitful activity like frivolous returns or devious attempts to get discounts or free goods.

The most profitable customers are almost always the least problematic.

Perpetual complainers or habitually caustic, abusive, or mean customers transmit a powerfully negative effect throughout a business that affects both employees and other customers. Businesses must protect employees and customers from uncalled-for, objectionable and unpleasant experiences and interactions with these dreadful people.

Firing a customer does not mean to fire them like Donald Trump. Instead, it should be delicately communicated to them that their expectations are much different than what the business can offer, so, they would be much happier and more satisfied if they found a business that could meet their expectations. If possible, alternatives should even be suggested.

It's like this: if an apple vendor, with nothing but apples, is asked for an orange, the apple vendor cannot meet the orange expectations. A caring vendor will not simply brush them off, but instead assist them in finding an orange vendor.

They may get their feelings hurt and threaten to voice their opinion, but they are probably already doing that the whole time their expectations are not being met anyway. Besides, getting fired may make them realize that they are the problem and it just might make them into better customers.

Businesses must make a profit, nothing else really matters. That means having customers that are satisfied with their experience. Sometimes, maintaining that profit and satisfaction means firing customers.