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Ruby Newell-Legner is considered the pre-eminent Customer Satisfaction Expert in the Sports & Leisure Industry today.

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Choosing the Right Mindset When Working with Challenging Customers

By Ruby Newell-Legner, CSP

When things go wrong, and they sometimes will no matter how hard we try to think of everything, it is how you respond that makes a difference. Inevitably there will be the occasional disgruntled customer. No matter how wonderful your products or services are or how committed you are to provide the best customer service, problems do occur. Armed with the following perspective, you can diffuse a situation and possibly even save the customer, as well as the reputation of your organization.

1. View complaints as gifts. Complaints can be a great source of information, innovation and inspiration. They can help you gain valuable ideas for new products/services, recover a customer who might have otherwise decided to go elsewhere, fix problems that could be the cause of other customers leaving, or gain a customer for life by resolving the complaint quickly and efficiently. Only 4% of upset customers complain. The other 96% simply leave and never come back. A complaint gives you the opportunity to resolve the situation and learn how to run your business better. By choosing to look for the "gifts" upset customers offer you, you take the first step in approaching the situation with an open mind. That mindset will come across in all the subliminal signals that you are sharing with them as you listen.

2. The customer is not always right...but they are the customer and we want to keep them as a customer. Their investment in our business is valued, and we need to do whatever it takes to keep them happy. It's cheaper to solve the problem. It costs six times more to obtain a new customer than it does to retain the current one. (Recent surveys say it can cost up to ten times more!) Keep the situation in perspective and remember the "Big Picture". Don't let the pesky little things upset you. Be glad you don't live with them. Obnoxious customers are often embarrassed because they made a mistake and want to blame it on you.

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Would You Work For You?

By Ruby Newell-Legner, CSP

Robert had a picture of a pack of huskies leading a dog sled on his bulletin board. The caption read, "Unless you are the lead dog, the view never changes." He had been my number one assistant for over a year when I came home from a conference to find his staff shirts, keys and security cards on my desk with his resignation.

It basically said he was tired of doing all the work and not getting any of the credit. He told a story about how he had spent months working on a research project for our executive director only to sit in the audience of a board meeting and watch our leader take credit for all the findings. I know I had contributed to his frustration as well.

I remember how before I left for that conference, we had reviewed all he had to do while I was gone. He seemed fine with it all until I sat and read his letter of resignation and then I realized how I had been dumping on him for quite some time.

Please see *Would You Work for You?* on page 2

"I walked in 'wondering' and walked out energized and ready to LEAD. I liked the variety of information Ruby presented; interactive tasks, stories and presentation."

Michelle Kline, Director of Operations, Wildside Caterers – Excel Energy Center/St. Paul RiverCentre, St. Paul, MN

"Ruby is a dynamic and energetic professional whose broad based presentations serve service professionals."

Jennifer LeMaster, Executive Services Manager, Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA

"In over 25 years of customer service and many customer service training sessions; Ruby and her program is the best and most informative I have ever attended!"

Wayne Douglas, Security Captain, BC Place Stadium, Vancouver, BC, Canada

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I didn't mean to, he was just so good at his job. He would take on projects and complete them on time and with great eagerness. His assignments usually involved work on the computer which I was just learning to use and he had just finished school so he had lots of experience creating the most professional looking spreadsheets.

It was before we had sophisticated software that would show profits and losses so at budget time I would ask him to run comparison worksheets. I always thought he loved those projects but I didn't realize how over the years he just felt taken advantage of.

In looking back this is what I learned:

1) Thank staff for the work that they do. No matter how many times you think you say thank you, you need to say it more. People who work hard need recognition for what they do. In frequent programs I ask "How many of you feel too motivated on your job?" I have never had anyone raise their hand.

2) Communicate in a professional manner. After a conversation with a staff member, reflect back on the circumstances. Did your words maintain respect for the employee as a human being? Was the tone considerate? Was the timing of the conversation appropriate? Was it in the right setting? Did you take the employee aside so their peers did not overhear the discussion?

3) Acknowledge Performance. When someone works hard on a project and you steal their credit it demoralizes their ambition. It would have been so easy for our Ex. Dir. to have Robert stand up in the meeting and acknowledge all the work that Robert had done on the project. But it was easier and more glorifying for our leader to just take the credit for himself. In the long run it cost us a very good man.

4) Get them the tools they need to perform. Supervisors need to make sure employees have all the tools to do their job; it should be our goal to make it easier for others to complete tasks in the most efficient manner. Remove barriers by working to obtain needed resources. Consistently identify the needs of all those around us and then take steps to fulfill those needs.

5) Ask for their input. Actively request their ideas and work together to solve problems rather than focusing on our power and status to make all the decisions. We build a team when we invite everyone on staff to contribute to the solutions to challenges. Honor their contribution, resourcefulness and creativity.

6) Inquire about long-term career aspirations. It is important to frequently check in with our staff and see how they feel about the work they do. Ask them about their goals and identify steps you can take to help support their ambitions. Create opportunities for them to take on new responsibilities that nurture growth opportunities.

7) Take ownership for your mistakes. No one is perfect. The sooner you fess up and acknowledge that it was your fault the sooner you can move on and build a better relationship with the people involved.

I'm sorry Robert. I have learned a lot since our time together and realize now what a frustrating work environment I created for you. I should have paid attention to that picture on your bulletin board and realized that I was the view you were looking at.

If at any time while reading this article you felt a twinge of desire to send it to a current boss or someone you worked for in the past, remember how strongly you feel. As employees we have all felt slighted in our job at one time or another. We need to remember those moments to make us avoid creating those situations with the employees we supervise. What we say, how we say it, when we say it all have a lasting impact on staff morale.

My questions for you today are: Would you work for you? How does reporting to you feel? Do you show interest and concern for the employees who report to you? Does the work environment that you create, inspire employees to eagerly come to work everyday or dread every moment on the clock...or maybe somewhere in between. And most importantly, what can you do to make it better for the employees who report to you and make you look good?

Choosing the Right Mindset from page 1

3. You can't take it personally. When a customer is upset, remember that it is not a personal attack. Though it may feel like the customer is attacking you remember - "this isn't about you - it is about their frustration over the situation." If you take the customer's complaint personally, matters are sure to get worse before they get better. Don't allow what the person is saying to get you emotionally involved. When you let him or her "push your buttons" you lose. When you respond emotionally-with anger, sarcasm, distress, or tears-you can't respond rationally. The angry customer wants to upset you because they think you'll give them what they want so you can get rid of them. Many discourteous customers act that way because they made a mistake and want to blame someone else to take the attention away from their error. Don't let these customers get to you by responding emotionally or giving in to outrageous demands. Ignore inappropriate words. If you allow cursing to offend you, you've lost your objectivity and control, and the angry customer has won. Edit their comments in your head so you can make sense of their words without getting upset. On the other hand, if the language is really offensive, remind the customer that you are a professional and expect to be treated like a professional. Let them know that when they calm down and use appropriate language, you will be happy to address their concerns.

4. Dealing with the person and their concern is your responsibility. This is a part of your job working in the service industry dealing with the public. We are all team players and share in the triumphs and failures of customer service. Do not assign blame or pass the customer off to another team member. Remember how you may have felt in the past if someone handed an angry customer off to you and do whatever you can to avoid doing that yourself.

5. Let go of the negative. Control your self-talk. When you hear yourself saying negative things about the customer (or the situation) - STOP! Don't waste your time and energy. You have little control over the personality of the customer - especially their mindset. But, you can control how you react. Be in control of your emotions.

6. Stay calm and remember no one makes you mad. You choose to get mad, or sad, or happy. So, don't choose to get mad at customers. Instead, choose to have a positive attitude. Do not get into a yelling match. For starters, you'll lose and your organization will lose. When the customers' temper gets the best of them, keep your demeanor calm and purposeful.

7. Make it a game or challenge to see how many upset customers you can turn around. See if you can get them to be reasonable. Instead of being offended, make a choice to make it better for you and the customer. This perspective will take the focus away from the negative and help you focus on resolution. Think to yourself, what will be better after I calm this customer down and address their concern?

8. Moods are contagious. What attitude are you conveying? Studies have proven that the number one reason customers choose to go elsewhere is because of poor handling of a situation. Most often that dissatisfaction comes from the mood or attitude of the individual that the customer encountered while trying to resolve their concern or complaint. Are you "infecting" others with good or bad moods? This mood will also demonstrate if you are ready to move up in the organization or if you need to "mature" in your role. Remember your mood or attitude can be contagious. What perspective are you spreading?

9. Work at gaining loyal customers. The number one reason that customers stop buying from a business is because they were treated poorly by someone. It is much more cost effective to retain loyal customers than to gain new ones. In order to create loyalty, you have to calm down upset customers and ensure them that you will work to find a solution that they deem acceptable. Let them know that their business is important. Thank them for their patience and cooperation. In many cases, it pays to promptly address upset customers' concerns to keep their business.

10. Be prepared to learn from this opportunity. Dealing with each unpleasant customer should be a learning experience if we keep an open mind and approach the situation in a positive manner.

An important concept to remember is that you won't please everyone. Challenging customers can be frustrating. But with the right attitude and techniques, many of these people can be turned into satisfied, loyal customers. It's not always easy, but it's worth it. Choosing the right mindset can make all the difference in how you feel about the customer and your job. Having respect for your customers will ensure their faith in and loyalty to you and your business.

Call Ruby today at 303.933.9291 to learn how to design and implement your staff development and recognition program. After presenting over 1700 programs in nine countries, Ruby has the experience and expertise to set your staff up for a great season.

"Ruby brings to light challenges that everyone faces and provides simple, effective ways to overcome them. I loved Ruby's enthusiasm and passion for empowering people to succeed."

Ashley Grubbs, PR & Marketing Specialist, Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA

Your Work is a Snapshot of Your Professional Image

By Ruby Newell-Legner, CSP

"Ruby brings high energy customer service training that sticks with employees."

**Kevin Bruder,
CEO, Centennial
Management
Group/E Center,
Salt Lake City, UT**

Back in my facility management days I would process up to 120 time sheets every two weeks. It wasn't my favorite task especially when Dave's time sheet came through. You see Dave didn't understand that his paperwork was a reflection of his professional image and it didn't appear that he really cared about the perception he left with me every two weeks.

Dave just couldn't seem to complete his time sheet accurately. It was either added up incorrectly or information was missing. I would frequently send it back to him to get it corrected but to no avail ... the same oversights would appear the next round.

To make it worse, Dave usually completed his time sheet over his lunch break so almost every time sheet had at least one "scratch and sniff" on it, sometimes peanut butter and sometimes jelly - occasionally I was lucky enough to get a combination of the two. You can imagine my frustration trying to straighten a pile of 120 time sheets when one of them stuck out crooked because of the sticky substance on it.

In one of my counseling sessions with Dave, I asked if he realized that at least 8 people saw his time sheet every two weeks. Apparently he didn't understand that his paperwork was leaving an indelible "but almost edible" impression with many people in our organization about his professional image.

It's no surprise that Dave barely lasted one summer and wasn't considered for rehire. Yes there were other things that he needed to learn but that one thing was his biggest demise.

That leads me to the questions for you today...

What kind of impression does your work leave with your organization? Is the snapshot of your work a positive professional image or one that could use some sprucing up?

Your reputation is based on the impressions you leave everyday, what you say and don't say, in meetings, in the hall and in simple conversations. Your communication, whether it is in writing or in voice mail, leaves an unforgettable perception with your co-workers.

Remember - it's not your boss who promotes you...everyone you work with will contribute to your success based on the impression they have of you.

What snapshots did you leave today?

"Everyone involved in business should hear Ruby speak!"

**Mark Kaminski,
VP of Operations,
Silverback Sports
Center,
Suwanee, GA**

Ruby  **Speaks**

Ruby Newell-Legner, CSP
Speaker • Trainer • Author

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