



Customer Service: Stop Sabotaging Your Customer Relationships

By: Lora Adrianse ©2004

If you've called for customer service recently you're familiar with this recorded message "*This call may be recorded or monitored for quality purposes.*" I immediately think to myself, "Oh great, here comes the game of 20 questions."

Now don't get me wrong. I spent many, many years training Customer Service Reps. (CSR's). I'm all for making sure customers receive the best possible service. *What I'm not for* is the pre-scripted list of questions CSR's are required to ask, regardless of whether they are applicable to the situation at hand. I've seen some checklists with as many as 25 pre-scripted "call quality" standards that CSR's are required to use. If they don't, and someone happens to monitor the call, they get marked down. Ludicrous I say!

Let me give you a few highlights from a recent call I made to my well-known auto club:

CSR: What is the year, make and model of your vehicle?

Me: 2000, GMC, Yukon, Denali

CSR: There is no 2000, GMC, Yukon, Denali (obviously it couldn't be found in her list of computer options so she needed to tell me I was wrong)

Me: Yes there is, I drive it every day

CSR: What's wrong with your vehicle?

Me: I don't know. It won't start.

CSR: Does it need to be towed or jumped?

Me: I don't know. I don't know what's wrong with it.

CSR: Well do you think it needs to be towed or jumped?

Me: I have no clue.

CSR: Where is your vehicle?

Me: In my garage.

CSR: Can you push it out of the garage into the driveway or the street?

Me: No. It's a full size SUV. I can't push it anywhere.

CSR: Is there another way you can get it out of the garage?

Me: No. It won't start.

Eventually, after I'd jumped through enough hoops, the call finally ended.

Chances are it wasn't the CSR's idea to get her laughs for the day by asking me stupid questions. Instead, her own company sabotaged her ability to quickly and efficiently take care of her customer, by requiring she use a scripted questioning process.

What Could Have Gone Better?

For starters, rather than telling me that the make and model of my vehicle didn't exist, she could have said that she was having trouble finding it in her database, and then asked for verification.

Next, instead of asking me twice about whether the truck needed to be "jumped or towed", she might have asked if I had any ideas about what could be wrong with it.

And finally, considering that she already knew the vehicle wouldn't start, asking a woman to push a truck out of a garage seems a little unreasonable.

What Needs To Change?

First, re-think your call quality standards. You may have too many standards; they may be too focused on internally created "shoulds", with very little focus on what matters most to your customers. Involve your CSR's and customers in the process.

Secondly, empower and train your CSR's to think, act and personalize service to best accommodate the given situation. One size does not fit all, or even most! Teach your CSR's how to recognize different communication styles, and then how to adapt their personal style so they can best relate to the customer as an individual. In other words, teach CSR's how to treat customers how THEY want to be treated.

And thirdly, continually ask for feedback from CSR's as well as customers. Make time to find out what's working and what's not working. Pay attention to what they have to say. Make ongoing improvements that benefit everyone. Repeat the cycle.

Companies spend thousands, if not millions of dollars each year to acquire new customers, yet sometimes they forget about how to best take care of the customers they already have.

Everyday your customers and your CSR's make decisions about whether to stay with your company or go to your competitor. Loyalty is built on good, solid relationships. Your company relies on the loyalty of your CSR's to service your customers. And great customer service can set you apart from your competition. Take action now! Stop sabotaging those relationships with unnecessary standards that don't really matter to your customers. Your customers and your CSR's will love you for it.

Lora Adrianse is passionate about helping people build dynamic business relationships in the workplace and with their customers. She can be reached through her website www.connectionscoach.com.