



Julie Gaver Training & Development, LLC

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Theme: *Customer Service
(Annual Vacation Issue)*

”As far as customers are concerned, you are the company. This is not a burden, but the core of your job. You hold in your hands the power to keep customers coming back - perhaps even to make or break the company.”

- *Unknown*

My husband and I recently vacationed in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. (*Translation: My husband was sick of hearing me whine about how much I hate the cold*). I asked my travel agent to recommend someplace warm. His response was “are you looking for a great deal?” (*Translation: I know you are cheap so let’s not waste too much of my time!*) He told me a new resort had just opened January 1 and they were offering some amazing discounts in order to attract patrons and build their reservation list. (*Translation: Human guinea pigs needed pronto!*)

What happened that week can best be described as a comedy of errors. However, our experience produced many valuable customer service lessons and truths which are relevant to any organization.

After a flight which was 1 ½ hours late departing from BWI, we arrived at the resort only to be told that rooms would not be available for 2-3 hours even though we arrived well after the posted check in time. We were not alone. The lobby was filled with very unhappy guests who were anxious to ditch their winter garb and don their Speedos, a sight which will forever haunt me. Some patrons never received rooms in spite of having reservations and were eventually transferred to other resorts. Lucky for them!

I’ve noticed that during times of customer discontent, two kinds of patrons emerge: the ranting, raving, “TAKE-ME-TO-YOUR-SUPERVISOR NOW!!!!” patron and the kill ‘em with kindness, smile till your cheeks hurt, call ‘em by their name and become their new best friend- patron. I chose to become the latter, especially after seeing the screamers getting nowhere!

Although the kindness tactic produced only *slightly* better results, they both prompted free drinks to suddenly appear out of thin air. It’s amazing how

forgiving you can be when you are continually plied with alcoholic beverages!

As the week progressed I salivated like one of Pavlov’s dogs every time something bad happened, knowing that a fruity concoction was forthcoming! The problems were never rectified but with a pina colada in your hand, who cares? Can you imagine that tactic in any other industry? Would an insurance agency send out rate increase notices to policy holders followed by a six pack of Coronas?

The list of service snafus was endless.....card keys that just stopped working, power outages, patrons begging for towels, restaurant nightmares. I could go on, but three words made it all worth enduring-- Eighty degree temperatures!

So, what does this have to do with you and your business? Here is what I **know** for sure:

- 1) When you make a mistake, talk is cheap. Make it right!
- 2) Give authority to your employees so they CAN make things right (within reason, of course!)
- 3) Don’t promise what you can’t deliver.
- 4) Your organization is only as good as your worst employee.
- 5) When communication breaks down, everything breaks down!
- 6) Never, ever, EVER underestimate the PR power of an unhappy customer.

How does *your* company rate? People are talking!

Julie

PO Box 51 Myersville, MD 21773
Julie@juliegaver.com
www.juliegaver.com