

THE BEAUTY OF BELLYACHERS

I'm talking about the customers who complain – who bellyache – about simple problems that we aren't taking care of. I'm defining "bellyaching" as simply asking for a solution to a mishap or bad service.

I know that as a business owner you can see them coming a mile away. It's the determined look, the steely glint in their eye, the wrinkled brow, the firm set of mouth. Clearly, the problem is eating away at them, and they aren't going to be happy until you've gone the last mile to take care of a problem that shouldn't have happened in the first place.

Big, powerful, faceless corporations may appear to be dehumanizing and intimidating, but that doesn't mean their customers have to settle for whatever they're handed. Customers always have a voice, and if they aren't happy, they can use their voices to complain and get what they want.

I'm a big promoter of bellyachers. I'm a fan of the ones who'll go out of their way to make sure things are done properly. The ones who'll make sure the customer behind them in line won't have to experience bad service. The ones who'll take a few minutes to tell the big corporations what they need to do to earn their business.

The average person today can go online and take a problem viral in minutes. Within 24 hours thousands will hear about the problem. The average person has 130+ friends on Facebook and numerous connections on LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media. They've made venting an art form. But the problem is, simply venting about problems does nothing to solve them.

Here are some thoroughly tested and proven tips for the complainers (bellyachers):

- **Go straight to the top.** Remember, the person who greets you at the door or counter is the lowest on the totem pole. They have no authority or skills for handling the company's problems. All they are capable of doing is letting you know that they'll get someone else to handle your problem.
- **Don't be a jerk.** You are dealing with real people with real feelings. When you want to complain, the emotion most often attached to that complaint is anger. Remember, anger just breeds more anger, and nobody wants to help someone who's acting like a jerk.
- **Ask lots of questions.** Get the person in front of you on your side. Oftentimes you'll be able to move forward in your quest for a solution if you simply ask what they would do if they were in your

position. Or you can also politely ask what kind of resolution is fair, and how they think the problem can best be solved.

What does it take to get action on a complaint? I tell every company I advise to *create a service recovery process*. Too many executives imagine their employees are born with good customer service skills. It's important to develop a process that gives employees some latitude in serving the customer, including specifically defined steps that must be followed in providing service recovery.

Providing great service requires decision-making and rule breaking – exactly what the employee has been conditioned against. Workers have been taught that it's not their job to alter the routine. Even if they'd like to help the customer, they are frustrated because they aren't allowed to do it. Worse, they don't know how.

- **Act Quickly.** The employee at the point of contact is best placed to implement service recovery. Avoid moving problems and complaints up the chain of command.
- **Take Responsibility.** Don't place blame, make excuses, or lie to cover up a mistake. Sincerely apologize and thank the customer for pointing out the problem.
- **Be Empowered.** Give those who work with customers the authority to do whatever it takes to ensure customer loyalty.
- **Compensate.** Give the customer something of value. Every organization has something of value that it can give to a customer who has experienced a problem.

I tell every customer that they have the right to a good experience, a quality product, and top-line customer service. I also tell them that it's their responsibility to let the appropriate channels know about an issue. You deserve quality and top-notch performance.

So to all you bellyachers out there, keep it up and let us know what the problem is so we can fix it.

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