Make It Easy for Someone to Conduct Business With You

BY JOHN TSCHOHL
Customer service is not very hard, but I think very few firms really try. There are four doors you need to use for effective customer service.

**Door One — Physical Location**

Your physical location is the most expensive. Your business needs to have hours convenient to the customer. Few firms do. Most banks are open hours and days convenient to the owner of the business. We call this banker's hours. There are many people that prefer to go to a place of business and see people face to face.

If your employees are rude and indifferent, it is the kiss of death. Most employees have never been trained on customer service. Very few are good at it. Too many firms do not care about whom they hire.

**Door Two — Website**

Your website should run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The problem is
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often that something does not work. The system has to be flawless. Your competition is seconds away. Price is very important. Whom can they call when there is a technical problem on your website that prevents the customer from buying? Is your call center staffed 24/7 like amazon.com or chewy.com?

**Door Three — Call Center**

Your call center should be 24/7 if you have more than 100 employees. Customers want answers fast. They like to pick up a phone and talk to someone. RCI, the largest time share management company in the world, is not open on Sundays. I still cannot figure this one out. When do people look for personal vacations. Sunday or weekdays? Young people age 18-28 prefer to figure it out on their own. What about the rest of the population? Who owns time shares? Older or younger people?

**Door Four — Online Email Support**

In December I was trying to rent a car for five days for my trip to Vail. The phone number did not work for the car rental firm. The reservation was for the wrong city and state. When I looked at their email saying I abandoned my reservation, I sent an email (no other way to communicate). The response was “Your question has been received. Your feedback, questions and concerns are important for us. We will contact you back within 7-10 business days for the future investigation.”

This is really stupid. I would be on my Christmas vacation in Vail skiing by then and I was making a decision in the next 24 hours. They should have said in the next 10-15 minutes. No speed. In Covid, I find few firms seem to want more business.

Most firms want to avoid interfacing with a customer. Many firms look at Amazon and say, “Wow, no physical location and look at their growth.”

My wife wanted me to call the firm we have used for years to get rid of mice in our house. They did not show up or return phone calls. I called them and left a message. At 10 a.m. they were not answering the phone. The technician rarely shows up. I believe 80 percent of the time in the United States employees don’t tell the truth. No service recovery. We have used them for years. They do not care. I called five firms for a rental property that has a huge mouse problem. (In Minnesota it is cold in December and January and mice like a warm area.) Two firms responded. It took the first firm five days to call me back. They never sent me an email. The second firm that I contacted called me back in seven days. They never sent the confirming email until two days later. Most firms must have so much business and money they just do not need more. Crazy.

Frankly, I should have picked up the phone to call additional firms, but they would probably be just as bad.

If you want to deliver exceptional customer service, everyone in the company needs to be trained with something fresh and new every four months. Today the training happens every five-ten years, or they just do nothing. Employee turnover is usu-

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**Lessons to Be Learned**

1. Master empowerment with all employees. Train your staff on empowerment. Push employees. Send those who do not believe in empowerment to the competition.

2. Train everyone on customer service. This includes the CEO.

3. Understand that word of mouth is how you grow or die.

4. Eliminate stupid rules and policies. Most employees worship rules and policies. No one gets fired for following company policies. Most firms feel there are hundreds of millions of customers. If you lose a few million today no big deal. They know advertising is free. When your business is off 80 percent this is rather stupid.

5. Southwest Airlines and Delta are examples of customer-driven airlines. Everyone understands the power of great service.
ally about 30 percent annually. This means if you trained all your employees on customer service, in three years almost everyone you trained will be gone. Do you really think you can put someone through a magic seven-hour program and they will be perfect for life?

When the economy disappeared because of COVID-19 everyone needs to improve their customer service and focus on keeping customers. Firms have reduced the number of employees and eliminated the focus on customer service. I guess most firms are happy with their present revenue.

*MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.*

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