

Customer Service Improvement Proposal

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Executive Summary

The following report documents details of poor customer service experiences and the effects thereof, as well as possible solutions. Poor customer service was the problem presented before our group, "Tyrant-A-Sore-Us Wrecks." This report outlines our teams thought processes, critical thinking, research and collaborative efforts, while following classroom instruction, to arrive at the best solution available for any company.

By delegating responsibilities evenly within our team, meeting regularly both in and out of class, and collaborating together, we were able to write our problem as an open-ended question, so as to open a variety of problems and solutions for the issue.

Our supposition for the best solutions includes incentives and training for employee's to positively teach and inspire them to perform at their very best. With a mandatory annual training retreat the employee is given the opportunity to improve their knowledge base and customer service skills while vacationing at the expense of the company. In-house training, employee incentives, as well as monitoring and evaluation, encourage the employee to perform at their very best at all times. In turn, this provides exceptional customer service that strengthens the businesses reputation and overall success for all involved.

Project Description

Our group has incorporated the various experiences of customer service from each individual member, ranging from the customer and the company representatives, to the owners and policy makers, in order to produce an approach from an unbiased position. By doing this, we were able to discover and present solutions that will fix the problem at its very core, by starting at the top of the company and working all the way down to the ground level of face-to-face customer service.

This project requires us to work as a team. Our team comprises of 6 competent members from our Communications 1010 class. As a team we divided the responsibilities and research equally among all members. We each focused on a particular section of the requirements and followed a project completion schedule. By so doing, we were able to focus our individualized attention on every section and detail. Also, we coordinated through email and telephone for any and all additional support and communication. By dividing responsibility, doing thorough research, collaborating our ideas and attentively discussing all aspects of the issue, we were able to unify as a team to achieve dependable customer service solutions to ensure greatness for the company, the employee, and the consumers alike.

Methods

Customer Service is at the face of every company. Because of this, it is one of the most important elements of a business. Whether from a consumer's position or a business representative's position, we are faced with customer service encounters virtually every day. Because these encounters do not always end positively, we decided to name our group "Tyrant-A-Sore-Us Wrecks," in similitude of a tyrant customer, employee, or boss and the disasters that may be caused in a poor customer service situation.

As a team we implemented the "reflective-thinking sequence" developed by John Dewey over 80 years ago (Adler, Elmhurst 237). This sequence greatly aided our team to work together to make the best of each member's talents. An outline of these steps and how we applied them as a group is as follows:

1. Define the problem. This was done in our first meeting as a group. With much deliberation, we were able to pinpoint our problem in the form of an open-ended question.
2. Analyze the problem. This was also done in our first meeting. As we discussed topics and possibilities, we discussed what each would encompass. Our original question was too narrow, so we reevaluated our question and decided to change it. Once we changed the question, we implemented step two and dissected the problem. This made it possible to divide responsibilities to among the members.
3. Establish criteria for a solution. Once we completed the first two steps, we decided what criteria our solutions had to meet. This helped us research our possible solutions and choose those that proved to be best.
4. Consider possible solutions to the problem. Each member was required to contribute 2 possible solutions. Having 6 members, this was a total of 12 possible solutions to analyze. Because we had criteria in place, we were able to evaluate and discuss each solution, then pick the ones that would work the best.
5. Decide on a solution. After following the previous steps it was quite easy to determine our final solution. We were able to decide as a group on what we thought would be the most effective. At times, we were not able to fully agree so we implemented a voting process before finalizing decisions.

6. Implement the solution. As a group we researched how other companies implemented policies and procedures and used these methods as a guide. This was a very useful step because without a method of implementation no policy or procedure could be used efficiently.
7. Follow up on the solution. By the time we reached this step, we were able to compile all research and data to see how well these methods worked. The methods of influence used in the solutions proved to be some of the best for customer service. Therefore all the companies who implemented these solutions, or similar solutions, were some of the most successful businesses in the world (Adler, Elmhorst 237).

To achieve our goals as a team we followed these steps by meeting twice a week in class and once a week at a member's office. This ensured team unity and production. In these meetings we discuss all aspects of the project by following an agenda. This allowed us to coordinate, collaborate, and track all progress. We made an effort to make the meeting as pleasant as possible by bringing treats and giving everyone the opportunity to participate in making group decisions. We implemented a voting process to better assist us in the equality of control. Everyone contributed and was dedicated to accomplishing success and obligated themselves to the team by signing a team contract (See Appendix 1). Next, we will define what was involved in accomplishing our success and more fully outline each of these steps mentioned above.

Part I: Problem Question:

Our team was given a general topic in which to build upon. We initially chose "*the effects of a bad boss in the work place,*" then refined our topic into "*how does poor customer service affect a company?*" This open-ended question allowed us to approach the issue from every angle to formulate solutions that would benefit everyone. If we used a closed question it would be virtually impossible to approach the issue impartially or completely.

Final Question: "How does poor customer service affect a company?"

Part II: Analysis of the Problem

Our group had a variety of personal experiences with this issue from both consumer and company perspectives. This made for a very interesting and insightful project. We were able to investigate each bad experience emotionally and critically. Customer Service is a relationship between a company, their representative, and the consumer. This makes customer service more than simply a job to be done. Every individual involved has thoughts and feelings concerning the matter (Johnson, Olsen and Andreassen 4 – 30). When these experiences are bad, it can cause mental, emotional, and sometimes even physical repercussions. It became clear very quickly that the same applied with our team. We had to learn to work together proficiently because of our differences in opinion and experience. Once we were able to do this, we were able to more fully view the issue and solutions generally, thus obtaining success

A. Characteristics

The balancing act of positive and negative affects of customer service can be a company's greatest challenge; customer service is the forefront of every business. A customer often times develops a relationship with a brand, or local store, based on their initial dealings.

A customer service representative can set the tone for relationship development, and is the one responsible for building or destroying it. If a customer has a good experience with a representative, whether the situation was a positive or negative issue, the way it is handled sets the standard and creates a foundation for a good business-to-consumer relationship. If a customer service representative does not have the proper training, is unhappy with their job, or is just having a bad day, it can set the tone for a bad customer experience, creating the customer's opinion of the employee and the company. The least expensive advertising in the world is that of "word of mouth". One bad customer service mishap can become detrimental to a business. With digital media, social networking and smartphones, word can travel like wild fire. These negative opinions can affect the way others see the company without ever having encountered the business.

The customer service policies and procedures, as well as any training programs put in place by a company, play one of the most vital roles in the overall success of that business. Moreover, the happiness of an employee is crucial to stellar customer service.

B. Stakeholders

This issue affects so many different people on so many different levels. Business owners, shareholders, employees, consumers, communities and families can all be impacted by poor customer service. The snowball effect of poor customer service can be catastrophic. Not only does it affect those involved in the initial interaction, it can put people out of jobs and companies out of business.

There are two stages of affect concerning poor customer service. The first is the initial interaction and those involved. When a customer service situation is handled poorly, someone is bound to get upset. When one person involved gets upset, chances are, the other will be unsettled as well. When this happens, it naturally causes a barrier of communication and a failure to establish any kind of working relationship. Unless drastic measures are implemented to better the situation, usually by an outside individual (i.e. a manager or boss), the customer will be lost for life. This has now negatively affected the employee, the company and the consumer. (DeWitt et al 10)

After this type of damage has been done, the next one's affected are the company owner and shareholders because sales have decreased. In an effort to rescue their company profits there is a chance they may terminate the customer service representative, especially if it is a recurring issue. Now, the previous employee's family is affected from the loss of income.

When taken to a larger level, many companies have gone completely out of business due to poor customer service and management. This affects all individuals encompassed with the failed company from the top of the company all the way to the ground level. It also negatively affects their families, and the community at large. When large companies go out of business, people lose their income, they spend less as a consumer and sometimes never recover financially, losing their homes and personal possessions. Consequently, entire economies can be affected.

C. History

In regards to companies offering good customer service and communication skills, one such company is Paul Reed Smith Guitars. They believe in creating an environment of customer satisfaction by giving their customer service representatives leeway in how they assist the customer. This leeway creates a wide variety of options in handling customers, which helps the representative view the problem itself instead of viewing the customer as the problem. The company also has the employees engaged with customers hands-on in areas the employee is passionate about. They keep their employees excited about their jobs by holding a yearly event

where they have celebrity musician's play, hold guitar building clinics and tours of the factory (Suttle, Vest 17).

Another example of good customer service is Preston Wynne Spa. They believe in hiring the right people to create the best customer service by seeking out happy, humble people with strong self-esteem. They believe these are key qualities for providing world-class customer service. They implement an evaluation period for all new employees to ensure they can, and will, provide all-star customer service. In addition, they train their employees continually on different types of social styles and provide the employees with a 5-hour training course in which they practice how to interact with customers. The company starts each day going over the clients coming in, so they are all on the same page. The spa hires secret shoppers to come in and evaluate service as well. These procedures encourage everyone to always perform at their best (Suttle, Vest 28).

ClearVision Optical recognizes the importance of good customer service so they have created a university to train all of their employees. They set up various events throughout the year to train the employees on how to better understand the company's culture and business goals. ClearVision Optical surveys employees at specific intervals throughout the year, giving them feedback on all processes and other information concerning the workplace. These surveys give them useful information on employee wants and needs. They have found that having all employees contributing ideas helps construct creative ways to improve the company and work environment. ClearVision gives employees recognition on a bulletin board when customers give positive feedback and offer various prizes and gift certificates. All this encourages their employees to uphold high customer service standards (Suttle, Vest 34).

These examples show that companies make great efforts to take good care of their employees because they know that happy employees will provide better customer service. They try to keep the paths of communication more horizontal than vertical which creates a sense of unity, as well as providing an environment where ideas for improvement can be given and received gracefully. They also recognize that training is important for employees to stay sharp. These companies do all they can to leave the customer happy and come up with ways to provide the best outcome for everyone.

D. Policies and Politics

Policies and Politics play a major role in customer service. Every company desires exceptional service but not all succeed. Policies are put in place to help regulate employee's behavior and performance. Politics governs all the policies put in place. All policies must be legal and fair but also pleasing to the company, employee, and consumers. When policies are put in place there are many factors to consider. Are the policies going to produce positive results? Are the policies legally and morally acceptable? Are the policies beneficial and constructive? Are the policies designed to accommodate the customer's needs as well as the company? All of these questions are important and relative to policy implementation.

Here are a few examples of policies and procedures used by national companies. These examples outline the policy and why it is in place. Target has 90-day returns "because you change your mind" policy. Also, "They do not sell tobacco, cigarettes, guns or toy guns resembling real guns, it is considered harmful to their consumer's health and safety" (Target, "Policies and Procedures," par. 19). Wal-Mart has a privacy policy that is customizable to the consumer" (Wal-Mart, "Policy and procedures," par. 48). Coca-Cola takes extensive measures to protect your privacy including not allowing children under 13 to make purchases online (Coca-Cola, "Online Policy," par. 48). Disney's Manufacturing Policy states "The Code sets forth our requirements for manufacturers of Disney-branded merchandise with respect to working conditions, compensation and benefits, working hours, nondiscrimination, health and safety, association and collective bargaining,

environmental protection, compliance with law, monitoring of compliance and publication of the Code itself” (Disney “Manufacturing Policy” par. 32).

As you review these examples you start to see how politics becomes very involved in the production of a policy. These policies are specifically designed to benefit the consumer while also benefiting the company.

E. Resources

There were many resources available for researching our topic and issue. Some of these resources and what they offered as informative are listed below:

- “Business experts agree that listening is a vitally important skill. In today’s highly competitive global marketplace, most theorists agree that management has to listen to everyone-customers, employees, scholars, government, and public at large- in order to survive and prosper” (Adler, Elmhorst 69).
- “Trust is an engine that (1) may work smooth as silk, (2) may work will in fits and starts depending on circumstances, (3) may groan and sputter” (Burnam 29).
- Strong personalities dominate some of their team meetings- my way or no way-a carryover from competition in graduate school. It reduces group creativity” (Lundin 107).
- “When the customers feel they receive good service, they also tend to view their service supplier as more attractive than the competition, it affects customer satisfaction, and not least the degree to which they develop financial, rational and emotional ties to the service supplier” (Johnson, Olsen and Andreassen 52).
- “To be successful when starting a business is to make sure you have successful customer service. If you don’t have clients you don’t have revenue. Word of mouth is the cheapest form of marketing” (Walter 38).

Part III: Criteria

As a group we had some difficulty coming up with a set of criteria that would potentially fit our solution. As we contemplated our issue, we realized that poor customer service is a wide spread problem. We rationalized that there must be current solutions in place; we needed an effective solution that would meet all of our criteria, but was flexible enough to be implemented in a wide variety of applications to meet business demand on a large scale.

A. We wanted a solution that could solve a multitude of problems for a multitude of business platforms.

B. A good solution will include:

1. Apply principles of effective communication that we are learning in the class.
2. Be achievable within our four-week time frame.
3. Cost less than \$500 per person.
4. Be applicable in multiple situations, diversifiable.
5. Easily implemented.
6. Time effective.
7. Easily outlined and understood.

Part IV: Brainstorming Possible Solutions

Brainstorming can be very problematic. Our group struggled with not giving initial feedback. Instead, we gave feedback during the entire brainstorming session. Because this feedback was positive, it created a more open environment which inclined members to be more open with thoughts and ideas.

Group proposed solutions are as follows:

1. A mandatory training course with a designated timeline for completion. These trainings would incorporate the basics of good communication, problem-solving skills, positive work environment & trust building skills, and how to best treat the customer. Each class would be approximately 1-2 hours in duration with a brief quiz at the end to ensure proper retention and understanding (Stringham 12).
2. Create short video trainings with supporting literature regarding essential communication skills. A large part of communication breakdown is poor listening skills, which leads to judgments and negative dispositions. Management would then be responsible for employee participation.
3. Continually monitor and evaluate current policies and procedures. This will allow the company to continually refine and improve their customer service platform.
4. Use money and resources to train all employees to better deal with difficult customers and situations.
5. Establish a 90-day trial period for all new employees. This will warrant if they are suited for a customer service position.
6. A training retreat promoted by the company creating a vacation feel while training. This will inspire the employee to attend while also allowing them to relax and clear their mind, better enabling them to focus on the training.
7. A training boot camp that would put an extreme twist on instilling a discipline and emphasis on team unity.
8. Pacified training that would put the perspective employees into everyday life situations, see how their demeanor is, then focus on their shortcomings to improve on them, along with positive affirmations.
9. Trial-by-fire is a method of immersing the employees directly into the frontline, accompanied by an experienced manager or employee capable of taking control if a situation gets out of hand. Video monitor the employee during this time, then use the footage to identify strengths and weaknesses, to either rectify or reward them. This footage could be compiled and used in future training to exemplify "Do's and Do Not's."
10. Evaluate and Improvise are ideal processes to determine the pros and cons of both policy and employee performance.
11. Recon and research is a great way to expand and improve. By finding a local business that exemplifies the type of customer service desired, then frequent the establishments to learn the techniques and policy. The best form of flattery is imitation.
12. Create employee incentives to encourage and support great customer service.
13. Have clear expectations and guidelines set for management and employees, and have strict rules or consequences for those who violate them.

Part V: Solution Analysis

- A. List of possible solutions
 - 90-day trial period ("trial-by-fire") with video recording
 - Training retreat

- Team building/trust exercises
- Incentives towards a comfortable work environment

B. Chart

The chart that we made helped narrow down what worked and did not work in regards to our final solution. It also reinforced that our solution met all needed criteria. The solutions are found listed across the top of the chart, while the criteria are listed on the left. We used a rating system from 0-5 with 0 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Scores were totaled to see which worked the best (See Appendix 2).

We found that all our solutions fit the criteria well. Based on our discoveries, we decided a different approach would be the most beneficial; we simply incorporated our top solutions into one.

C. Final Solution:

By working as a team, we concluded that our final solution needed to comprise a variety of remedies. We were able to create a solution that would be applicable to many different situations, therefore solving many companies' problems. We incorporated all of our strongest remedies into one set of policies. This was done by placing all new employees on a 90-day trial period, during this time they would be performing the required duties and then evaluated on their performance using a "trial-by-fire" method, as well as holding an annual training retreat and frequent in-house trainings with rewards and incentives.

By having a 90-day trial period for new staff, accompanied by a written contract outlining requirements and obligations of both parties, the employer is afforded the opportunity to evaluate a new employee's performance before hiring them as permanent staff. If, after their 90 days, the person is not performing according to the standards required by the company, they will be let go and the company moves on. In addition to this the company will implement a bi-annual review of each employees performance. This method utilizes the Coercive and Position Power techniques to influence employees to perform well (Adler, Elmhurst 247) .

One of the most effective ways to evaluate an employee is to fully immerse them into the job, making evaluation easier and more accurate. If they are able to successfully perform their duties, they are merited as an employee. Implementing a "trial-by-fire" allows the employer to see beyond the interview process and observe the employees performance hands-on. This method of training uses the Coercive Power technique to encourage good performance by the employee (Adler, Elmhurst 247).

It is difficult and very undesirable to sit at a desk for hours while someone lectures you on new policies, procedures, and regulations of a company. In order to make training more appealing, we decided to implement an annual training retreat for all employees. Aside from transportation, the company will provide all accommodations for this event, but no time compensation is included. The training retreat would be viewed as a vacation or a reward, making it a desirable event to attend by all employees. This retreat would allow all employees to become better acquainted with each other, which would create a sense of unity and family among them. The retreat will have many incentives such as prizes, employee recognition, and anonymous review of peers and management. The retreat itself is optional. Instead, one may watch training videos at the workplace that will integrate periodic quizzes to ensure material retention. This option of training must be completed within a 14-day time period determined by management. This is a great technique because it incorporates methods of Position Power by having all positions of the company attending, Coercive Power because it is a mandatory requirement for employment, Reward Power because there are many rewards and incentives involved, Expert Power because those who are

specialized in certain areas will be training all attendees, Referent Power because of the public recognition one receives from good performance and finally, Information Power because of the motivational way to deliver information given. All of these methods are ways one could influence a group and this solution uses them all (Adler, Elmhurst 247-248).

Having a positive, comfortable work environment is essential to positive attitudes and performance. Because of this, there will be frequent meetings and events held in the workplace that will harbor cooperation and trust between colleagues. Employee incentives will be smaller than that of the annual retreat, but still very rewarding. These incentives will include raffles, prizes, gift cards, company recognitions, etc. The main object is to build a stronger, healthier team through acquaintance and comradery by helping them get to know each other better. This method motivates and influences employees to perform at their peak using the Rewards Method (Adler, Elmhurst 247).

One foundational principle for company success is solid expectations with structure and command. If not already in place, the company must outline all duties and expectations for every department and position. This will reinforce company policy and procedures, while eliminating any confusion about job responsibilities and obligations. A clear chain of command will create a sense of security and support for all employees by clearly outlining authority. This is a great way to teach employees using the Expert Power of persuasion because the best professionals create it (Adler, Elmhurst 247).

D. Possible Negative Consequences:

A lack of willingness to participate will greatly affect a team. If a member is not willing to cooperate, the rest of the team will be affected. To secure a motivated team and an encouraging environment, the following should be implemented: Make sure any team member with a bad attitude is made aware their job is contingent upon them fulfilling certain requirements and obligations. If those requirements are not met they can, and will, be permanently dismissed. Next, contractually outline what is required of each employee and any deadlines if applicable. Training is not optional, but how the employee receives it is. For example, if they are unable to attend the training retreat, the team member has the option of staying in the office and completing training videos in its stead.

Individuals work better when they are part of a clearly defined team who all share the same goals within the company. By implementing ways of making team-building fun the team members are more likely to feel comfortable in their work environment, thus accomplishing more individually and as a whole.

Part VI: Implementation of the Solution

Implementation by chain-of-command is the ideal platform for operating a business. The goal of a chain-of-command structure is to give a sense of structure and security to all. Just as important though, is a sense of family, acceptance, and belonging within the workplace. When an employee has a strong sense of structure, security, acceptance, and belonging, they will naturally be more confident and constructive. By creating accessibility to all levels of authority, employees will be more comfortable and respectful. In case an issue arises, access to all personnel and authority is ideal for resolution. This can be useful when conflict arises employee to employee, or employee to consumer. The employee will know they have someone to turn to for help.

Our overall aspiration is to create a level of comfort and a sense of unity that will make the work environment a place one wants to be, rather than has to be. We greatly encourage an open style of communication that will resolve any anxieties or issues within the workplace. When employees are

satisfied and happy, they will naturally portray that in their actions towards others, specifically the consumer.

Great relationships are built on trust and unity. When this is created within a work environment it is easier to implement required tasks. Therefore, easier for managers to train and assist employees. Once these relationships are established throughout the company, they can be established with customers. This exceptional level of customer service creates loyal customers for the company who will continually support the businesses sales and profits, generating success for all involved.

Conclusion

In our economic downturn, it is vital for any company who wants to prosper to have excellent customer service. This safeguards sales and profits through building relationships with the consumer. Only through staff, specifically customer service representatives, is the company able to do this. Consumers are more than just a number or statistic. They are people with thoughts, feelings and emotions. These people are the ones spending their hard earned money that keeps each company in business. Companies and employees must realize it is their responsibility to treat these people well. There are many variables in establishing a great customer service team to represent a company, and the set of policies we have provided in this report are a proven solution to improving poor customer service for any company. By focusing on the employee and the consumer as real people instead of a responsibility, paycheck, number or statistic, these policies will create a sense of worth, fulfillment and contentment to all involved, whether directly or indirectly. The best business is achieved only with the best customer service.

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Appendix 1: Team Contract

Team Contract

Relational Norms:

1. We agree to contact the team in case of absence and delegate our responsibilities when needed.
2. We take full responsibility for assigned roles and tasks.
3. We will be respectful, courteous and supportive of our team.

Task Norms:

1. Minutes and details of each meeting will be recorded and dispersed appropriately.
2. We will follow an agenda (pre-dispersed) and use time wisely.
3. We will keep members informed of progress and completion of work assigned.

Consequences of breaking norms:

1. If insufficient notice/no notice/un-excused absence i.e. doctors note, speeding ticket, bail bond receipt, the group team member will then be required to write a one page, single spaced, times new roman 12pt font 1" margins, fictional story, on the reason(s) that person was unable to attend.
2. Obligated to bring treats for the group at the next class/meeting if a meeting is missed.

Problem Defined: "How does a bad boss affect customer service?"

Problem Analysis assigned:

- Characteristics- Cory
- Stakeholders- Windy
- History- Rick
- Policies and Politics- Erin
- Resources- Kaitlin
- Other- Sidney

Relational Roles;

- Sidney – Harmonizer
- Cory – Tension Reliever
- Windy – Keep it together-er
- Kaitlin- Listener
- Erin- Sensor
- Rick L.- Unitizer

Task Roles;

- Erin- Den mother, recorder
- Windy- Analyzer, editor
- Kaitlin-Watch dog/Badass
- Sidney-Interpreter, Idea giver
- Cory- Information Giver, leader
- Rick L.- PowerPoint specialist, Reminder-er

Appendix 2: Solution Analysis Chart

	Solution 1: 90-day trial period/trial by fire w/ video	Solution 2: training retreat	Solution 3: team building/trust exercises	Solution 4: incentives towards a comfortable work place
Criterion 1: apply principles learned in class	0	5	5	5
Criterion 2: be achievable within 4-week time frame	5	4	3	5
Criterion 3: cost less than \$500 a person	3	4	4	5
Criterion 4: be applicable in more than one situation	5	5	4	5
Criterion 5: easily implemented to staffing	5	4	4	5
Criterion 6: time effective	4	3	3	3
Criterion 7: easily outlined and understood	4	5	5	3