

ROADBLOCKS TO SERVICE RECOVERY

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From time to time, you may find your service recovery efforts blocked by certain actions or inactions on your part or others in your organization. While you may have good intentions related to re-establishing and maintaining a solid customer-provider relationship, there are a number of obstacles that can get in the way. Here are some of the obstacles that commonly derail recovery attempts.

Poor or inadequate communication

Without solid communication, recovery cannot occur when service breakdowns happen. The quality and amount of communication between you and your customer can be a determining success factor in maintaining a positive customer-provider relationship. Failure to keep the lines of communication open before, during, and after a transaction or customer contact (e.g. in the case of on-going customer situations, such as, a lawyer working with a client) can lead to breakdowns in the relationship. Every effort should be made to constantly update and consult with the customers. If they feel neglected or left out, further dissatisfaction and loss of business loyalty could result.

Not listening actively

You must take an active role in the communication process by effectively listening to your customers. You must not only receive data, but you must also analyze and act upon it appropriately. Many service providers go through the motions of listening; however, they fail to do so accurately or actively. This can send a definite message of "I really don't care about you."

Lack of respect for customers

Showing respect for your customers is tied closely to listening. Your actions, or inactions, related to customers and their problems or issues can lead to a perception that you are being rude, disrespectful, or uncaring. An example of little things that can lead to a perception of disrespect is for you to keep an external customer waiting even though they had a scheduled appointment (e.g. in a doctor's or dentist's office). A similar lack of respect might be demonstrated with internal customers when you show up late for a scheduled team meeting.

When customers feel disrespected, you and your organization or department lose as customers complain, display their dissatisfaction in front of other customers, and/or (in the case of external customers) desert to a competitor. This results in a loss of prestige and business.

Keep in mind that this lack of respect might only be the customer's perception. Even so, it is his or her perception that counts in such instances. The best strategy to prevent such a perception is to stay focused on the customer's needs and try to prevent

dissatisfaction. If a breakdown does occur, you must move quickly to recover by using the following basic steps to service recovery:

1. Apologize, apologize, and apologize again;
2. Take immediate action to positively resolve the situation;
3. Show compassion;
4. Provide compensation; and
5. Conduct follow-up to ensure that the customer is satisfied.

Inadequate or outdated materials or equipment

Trying to provide service excellence without the necessary tools is frustrating and ineffective. It also can speed deterioration of a customer relationship and destroy trust. For example, you may be calling a customer from a list provided by your marketing department in order to update an address or to sell the customer's new services or products. You may be unaware that other representatives from your organization have already contacted the customer, that the customer has already purchased the update from another service representative, or that the customer received a mail order solicitation that had a different (and better) offer for the same products and services. Your frustration goes up and credibility goes down in such an instance.

Lack of training

It's very difficult to perform at exceptional levels when you are not properly equipped with the knowledge and skills required. This is especially true in instances where you do not have adequate knowledge of the organization, its products, services and procedures, as well as the interpersonal skills needed to accomplish service recovery. Whenever gaps in these, or any other area related to customer service are identified, you should approach your boss with a request for training. This training might be informal (e.g. audiotapes/videos, CD-ROM, self-study courses, Internet courses, or written materials) or formal (e.g. classrooms, one-on-one coaching, or conferences). The format is not as important as the fact that you get what you need to better interact with and serve your customers.

Work conflicts

No matter how much you care and want to provide quality service, you may fail if you over-commit or if your organization overextends its human resources. It's impossible to be everything to everyone. When work scheduling creates a situation of being pulled in too many directions; failure is probable. To overcome this potential, constant monitoring of workload is required. Recommendations to your team leader or supervisor for schedule changes, job sharing, or reapportionment of workload might be appropriate.

The secret to successful service recovery when something goes wrong is planning, communication and a positive attitude toward the customer. By having a "can do"

attitude and the proper knowledge and tools, you can work to mend any broken fences with your customers.

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