

Turning a customer with a complaint into one of your biggest fans - the Wow Factor - have you got it?

Things do go wrong and most people are reasonable if a complaint is handled well. Handle it really well and you have a fan for life.

When working in the mobile 'phone industry, many things were out of our control and sometimes things did go wrong but I never lost a customer because of it and instead they always became my most loyal customers. Why? I told them how it was; what we were doing about it; kept in touch with them and eventually sorted it. I had already built up the trust and respect with them - I always kept my word and did what I said I would do, so it's not hard, or shouldn't be at least.

How do you treat complaints in your business? Do you turn your unhappy customers into fans for life? A few pointers to help:

1. show sympathy - apologise for the fact that the customer is upset "I'm sorry to hear that you are disappointed"...
2. Listen to what the customer has to say
3. Establish the facts
4. Agree what you will do
5. Give your name, so the customer knows who is taking responsibility for the problem
6. Keep the customer informed as you promptly and politely sort out the difficulty

If you just listen and sympathise, you're half way there. But, if you are defensive or don't listen, the complaint will escalate, the customer won't buy from you again and through BAD Word of Mouth could do untold damage to your reputation.

A couple of months ago I was quite taken by the most fabulous customer service I've received in a long time. I'll explain ... I had a button backed chair belonging to my late Mum which I had been meaning to get reupholstered for many years. Eventually I did. I chose the fabric, using [Giles Middleton Bray](#) near Cirencester on personal recommendation and away I went. Had seen his work which was brilliant. Picked up the chair. Delighted - absolutely fab.

However, the day after I had it home, my cat decided to check it out, only jumping the foot or so up to it. To my horror it had left paw imprints on the seat of the chair. Difficult to explain but very noticeable. Through various emailed pictures, we agreed it must have been faulty fabric. But of course the fabric manufacturer didn't want to agree to this and offered me 50% refund on the cost of the fabric. Excuse me???? I dropped the chair into Giles and he argued my case and eventually got them to refund the cost of the fabric and pay his costs to re-upholster.

Giles could so easily have just said 'no, nothing to do' and not bothered to pursue for me. This is the attitude of so many people in business. So a public thank you to Giles and definitely a 'word of mouth recommendation'. A great experience and I'm definitely a 'fan' for life!

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