

SUCCESSFUL SERVICE



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The Joy of Customer Satisfaction

BY ADA POLLA TRAY

As a consumer, there is nothing I like more, appreciate more, or enjoy more than excellent customer service. Case in point, clothes shopping. I am 100% loyal to a small clothing boutique in the Dupont Circle area of Washington DC, called Betsy Fisher. The boutique has been in DC for 15+ years, and the owner, Betsy, is as gorgeous as she is a wonderful sales woman. Since I started shopping there, about two years ago, she has learned my taste, my budget, and what I have in my closet. She invites me in for special events, she emails me when something arrives in her store that she thinks I will like, and always makes me feel like I am her most important customer. No wonder I don't shop anywhere else.

As a business owner, there is nothing I like more, appreciate more, or enjoy more than providing excellent customer service to my own clients. Perhaps because I know how much it means to me as a consumer, I go above and beyond to befriend my clients, to answer, even anticipate their needs and wishes, and to always be there when they need something. While my goal is to avoid any problem (whether a mistake in their order fulfillment, an error in their invoices, or discourteous phone service), I also make it a point to fix any problem (whether perceived or real) promptly, always with a smile.

In a world where calling customer service means having to speak to a pre-recorded message, pressing 17 buttons, and then doing it all over again before being able to talk to a live agent, personal, personable, and caring customer service is essential in all industries. But in the spa industry, customer service takes a special significance. The spa industry is about pampering, taking time for oneself, relaxing, stepping out of the day to day realities and problems for a few minutes, a few hours. How is one expected to achieve this without excellent customer service?

In this article, I will review the importance of customer satisfaction to profitability, the true costs of customer dissatisfaction, and I will provide some tips for ensuring that each and every one of your spa client leaves feeling happy, appreciated, and looking forward to coming back.

Customer satisfaction and profitability

One of my first lessons learned in business school is that it is more cost effective to maintain existing clients than to generate new clients. And maintaining an existing clientele requires customer satisfaction. Furthermore, per Ken Homa, marketing professor at the Georgetown University McDonough School of Business, customer satisfaction is directly linked to profitability:

By meeting client expectations and delivering superior perceived value, a business is able to amass a significant number of good, happy clients, and thus increase its market share. As a result of increased market share, that same business will not only be able to spread its fixed

expenses on a larger client base, but also be able to leverage its increasing bargaining power with suppliers.

The truth about customer dissatisfaction

If business school models of profitability are not enough to convince you of the importance of customer service, consider the following facts, identified in 2004 by the Research Institute of America in a study on the true costs of poor customer service:

- The average business will hear nothing from 96% of unhappy customers who receive rude or discourteous treatment.
- 90% of those who are dissatisfied with the service they receive will not come back or buy again.
- Each of those unhappy * customers will tell their story to at least nine other people, and 13% will relate their tales of woe to over 20 people.
- For every complaint received, the average company has 26 customers with problems, six of which they consider serious problems.
- Only 4% of unhappy customers bother to complain. For every complaint you hear, 24 others go uncommunicated to your company, but not uncommunicated to other potential customers.
- Of customers who register a complaint, between 54% and 70% will do business again with your firm if their complaint is resolved. The figure rises to 95% if the customer feels the complaint was resolved quickly.
- 68% of customers who quit doing business with an organization do so because of company indifference.
- It takes twelve positive incidents to make up for one negative incident in the eyes of your customers.

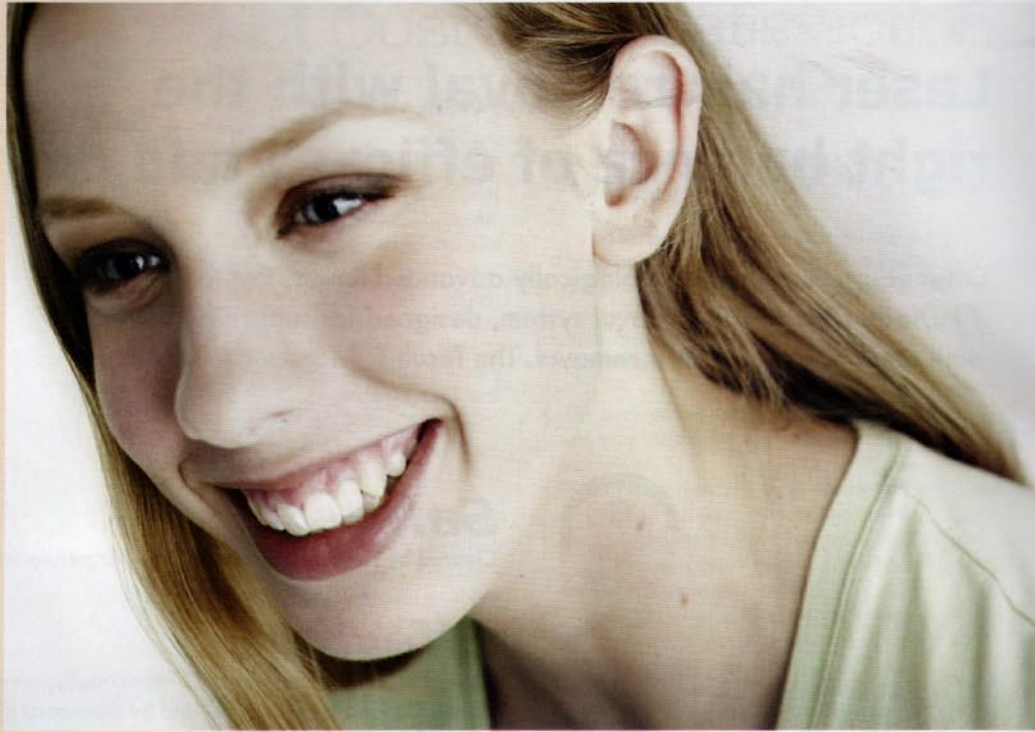
This study clearly illustrates the potential costs of poor customer service, in terms of negative word of mouth and lost revenue.

Tips to ensure customer satisfaction

In order to ensure happy clients, a few general rules apply to the spa environment, in particular to the reception area. Indeed, on average, 75% of spa client complaints center on what happens outside of the treatment rooms; hence the following tips focus on the environment outside of the treatment room.

- Phone calls should be answered with a standard greeting and verbiage that matches the spa's mission, an informative hold message or calming music, and a voicemail system that works.
- All client calls should be returned within 24 hours.
- Clients should benefit from reminder calls for their appointments, again from a staff person using a standard message and greeting.
- The check-in process should be seamless, involving immediate eye contact, a smile, general courtesy, and the offer of a complimentary beverage. Should your front desk staff be on the phone when a guest arrives,

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eye contact and a smile are particularly important to reassure the arriving guest that you have noticed them, and are looking forward to serving them.

- Repeat clients should benefit from name recognition and proper name pronunciation.
- Scheduling issues should be minimized as much as possible, as this is an extremely sensitive area for spa guests.
- At check-out, payment should take precedence over everything else that might be going on at the reception desk.
- At check-out, every client should be asked "how was your service today," so that he/she has an opportunity to express dissatisfaction (remember that only 4% of unhappy clients bother to complain; how are you supposed to ensure client satisfaction if you don't know your client is dissatisfied?).
- Clients should benefit from follow-up calls a few days after their appointment to once again be given an opportunity to voice any concerns.
- A hand-written thank you note should be sent after all spa visits, either from the therapist or from the spa manager.

All of these tips have one common link – they are meant to show the client that we care. Indeed, indifference, whether real or perceived, is one of the sure ways of generating client dissatisfaction. And remember, 68% of customers who quit doing business with an organization do so because of company indifference.

The implementation of these suggestions requires that more than one person is present at the front desk, in particular during the busiest times; and that each front

desk person be empowered to fix mistakes and take steps to turn an unhappy client in to a happy, loyal fan.

The perfect apology

Despite our best efforts at ensuring customer satisfaction, mistakes do happen. Should a guest feel slighted, the perfect apology will not only ensure the guest's ultimate satisfaction, but will actually increase your client's loyalty, as you will have proven how well you handle difficult situations.

Should an apology be necessary, remember the following. A perfect apology:

- Acknowledges the mistake or wrongdoing (don't blame the client)
- Accepts responsibility (don't pass the buck)
- Expresses regret (don't show indifference)
- Provides assurance that the offense won't be repeated (don't leave the client wondering if this will happen during his next visit)
- Is well timed (don't wait)

Conclusion

The secret to providing excellent customer service is to create a virtuous circle of happy people! As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, I get as much enjoyment and pleasure from both *receiving* and *providing* excellent customer satisfaction. As such, "sell" customer satisfaction to your team by letting them know how happy it will make them.

And remember, there are only two rules for customer satisfaction:

- 1) The client is always right.
- 2) When in doubt, refer to rule number 1. ■