

Lessons in Customer Service: The not so good, the bad, and the worst – By Dan Goldberg



Within the not too distant past I had some interesting experiences that cut to the core of the dos and don'ts of customer service.

In the middle of February I received an offer from my local telephone provider informing me that for "one low price" I could consolidate my local and long distance phone services and have unlimited calling in both areas. Plus, included in the price was unlimited use of other services that I either already had or wanted to add on. Sounds pretty good, right? Right!

My fingers reached for my phone keypad and off they went...dialing the toll-free number to sign up. Hmm...on came that unsettling message, "Due to excessive volume, your call can not be answered at this time. Please hang-up and call back at another time." Wait a second, this is the phone company; aren't they supposed to be prepared to handle excessive volume? There certainly are enough folks looking for jobs to be hired to handle this promotion. Or at least give the option of putting us in voice mail for a call back or have call waiting, two of the services that they're selling!

Lesson one: Never run a promotion that you can't handle.

I must have tried to get through to them at least twenty times. Each time I received the same message. Finally a week or so into my attempts, I received a different message telling me to hold for the next service representative! However, while holding I was also told that I would hear nothing until the rep picked up. Doesn't the phone company understand the power of messages on hold? Don't they realize that they could be informing me of different products and services while I sit there wondering if I will ever hear a human voice? Finally, at 7:50 A.M. Paulette answers. Ahhh...an actual person!

Lesson two: Use every opportunity to sell and/or inform you prospects and clients.

Paulette runs me through the script (literally). She informs me that she has to do it that way. I make my choice. I'll take the extra package. I tell her

how important my multiple voice mail is and I ask her to make sure that it's included (even though she already told me that it was). I also want to make sure that my current multiple voice mail is not cut off in the transition, especially since I'm just changing phone packages, not phone companies. She states absolutely that it won't be affected.



She tells me to hold while she gets a supervisor to finish the process. I'm put on hold to the vast nothingness of "waitdom." At 8:05 the supervisor comes on and begins reiterating what I've just agreed to. She takes a breath and says, "Does that sound right, Mr. Goldberg?"...Mr. Goldberg...hello, Mr. Goldberg...hellooooo. Seems the supervisor couldn't hear me, as I first answered her in a normal tone of voice...then increased the volume to the point where I woke up the chipmunk that lives under my deck! My hellos and yeses in response to her questions went unheard. Then I heard those dastardly words from Ms. Supervisor to Paulette, "He hung up!"

Wait! Don't! I'm here...on the other end! Helppppppp. Too late. Silence. I'm cooked. Maybe, just maybe, my friendly Paulette will use her customer service smarts and think, "Hold it, this guy tried to get through for a week, was diligent and persistent. He wouldn't have hung up; something must have gone wrong with the connection ...I'll call him back!

Nah, no such luck.

Lesson three: If you've been speaking with a prospect/client and something abnormal happens to your connection take the initiative and call the prospect/client back.

I waited a few minutes, 'til 8:09, and called them. Miracle of miracles, I got the "Hold for the next representative message." Ok, I must be in luck! And, something changed in the time between Paulette and now. A new message bellowed through my speakerphone while I was on hold - the famous "Your call is important to us, please hold and the next available representative will be with you shortly." "No it's not and no they won't," I said to myself. At 8:22 Bob picked up. Not so shortly, but at least it was Bob! I told Bob all about my misadventures. He said, "Mr. Goldberg, don't worry. I'll take care of you." Ok Bob, let 'er rip.

He ran me through the script (again). I agreed to the same stuff, told him about my voice mail concerns, whereupon he worked to make sure that was not a problem. Bob then transferred me to his supervisor Heather. Heather began to run down the menus of services that I agreed to and finished with the obligatory, "Does that sound right Mr. Goldberg?" I answered yes and she said good. She said "Good"! Heather could hear me...YES, I had reached telephone Nirvana!! Now Heather informed me that she was going to pass me along to her supervisor Carolyn for the final step. But before I allowed her to connect me, I informed her about all my previous problems and asked her to please stay on the line to make sure that Carolyn picked up. "No problem Mr. Goldberg." Then it happened, at 8:58 she put me on black hole hold - no sound, no Heather, and by 9:16 no Carolyn. I gave up. Nirvana had quickly morphed into Nausea.

Lesson four: Listen to your clients and follow-through on their requests - assuming of course that those requests are reasonable. If they're not, give them alternatives.

All it would have taken to win a client for life was to listen to my frustrations. Hold my hand. Listen some more. Take me seriously and walk me through the process. Give me a phone message that meant something. And never let me hold for more than 30 seconds without someone picking back up to

Lessons Learned

1. Never run a promotion that you can't handle.
2. Use every opportunity to sell and/or inform you prospects and clients.
3. If you've been speaking with a prospect/client and something abnormal happens to your connection take the initiative and call the prospect/client back.
4. Listen to your clients and follow-through on their requests - assuming of course that those requests are reasonable. If they're not, give them alternatives.
5. Make sure that your sales and customer service reps relay a consistent message.
6. Also make sure that everyone has the same product and service spec sheets.
7. Address the specific concerns of your client/prospect.
8. Don't assume.
9. Always follow-up

check with me. Finally, if they would have had a *call me back to make sure that everything met with my satisfaction* element to their script, maybe I wouldn't have felt like pulling the few hairs I have on the top of my head out.

By now it was a personal challenge. It took me three days, but I finally got through. And what rep should I get, out of the untold multitudes, but Paulette. And she remembered me! She began, on this Thursday morning at 7:00, by profusely apologizing. Something, I was informed, had gone terribly wrong with their phone system that day...too much rain and bad weather had done something to their lines. Huh?! This is the phone company.

I'm buying something from them...this is not a good thing to hear! Ok, I thought, it happens. Paulette just get this thing completed, and don't forget about not interrupting my voice mail. Between Paulette and her Supervisors everything went smoothly. I was in. Yet something in the back of my head kept gnawing at me. What's gonna go wrong? I just don't trust the phone company and their lack of customer service.

The next Tuesday it happened. I called in for my messages and voila...no voicemail, just one ring after another. I was irate. I felt like a jilted lover. Paulette, you promised.

Off my fingers went, dialing away to the main office. On came Rita. I went through the whole litany. She promptly informed me that multiple voice mail wasn't included. What! Now I felt worse than jilted, I had been cheated on. Paulette and five other people promised me that it was included.

Who trains these sales and customer service reps anyway? Aren't they given the same product lists?

Lesson five: Make sure that your sales and customer service reps relay a consistent message.

Lesson six: Also make sure that everyone has the same product and service spec sheets.

"Rita could you transfer me to your Supervisor, please?" "Hold please" Oh no, not hold! It was ok, on came Nick who reiterated that indeed, it wasn't included. "Give it to me anyway, I'll pay the extra, just reconnect it," I replied.

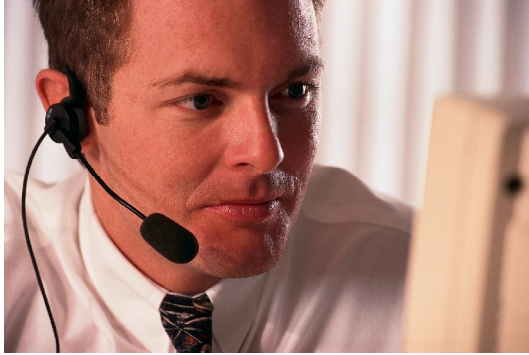
The next day it was reconnected, but of course, in the process, my unlimited special package was dropped and I was back to square one. Where's Alexander Graham Bell when I need him?

Lesson seven: Address the specific concerns of your client/prospect.

Lesson eight: Don't assume.

I am not one to give up - one last try before I go to the FCC.

That night I call the famous toll-free number. This time I get right through! This is too good to be true! Then Mr. M gets on the phone. His thick New York dialect cuts through the line like butta. Am I calling Pennsylvania, I ask? Yes you are Mr. Goldberg, except I'm up here in New York taking on the overflow. Finally the phone company realized that people can't be put on hold for fifteen minutes at a time.



I tell him everything. He says, "I don't think you're speaking a different language here; I understand what you want completely." "You want the extra package with multiple voice mail, which, unfortunately, doesn't come with the extra package, right?" "Right," I responded. I didn't want to argue that five people told me that the multiple voice mail did indeed

come with the package.

Mr. M was proficient. He not only walked me through everything, he repeated all the items that I was getting and he stayed on the line to make sure that I was connected to his supervisor. Then he gave me the kicker. "In five minutes, which should be more than enough time to finish your conversation with the next person, I'll call you back just to make sure that everything went ok...is that alright with you?" Alright? It's downright fantastic!

Lesson nine: Always follow-up

Finally I've got the package. Ok, so I paid extra for something I thought was included...but what the heck.

Of course my original multiple voice mail is no more. All the saved messages are gone and I have to re-program the whole thing. However, I'm *unlimited* now!

There is one irony. The first person to call me after my call to Mr. M was a buddy of mine. I began to tell him the story of my voyage through the galaxy that is the phone company and my desire to get the unlimited package. Where upon he told me that he just purchased the same package...and how neat it was that multiple voice mail was included!

All righty...just don't put me on hold!!

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