



What If You Do Your Job Right 99.9% of the Time?

IS THAT GOOD ENOUGH? IF YOU THINK SO, WOULD YOU ALSO ACCEPT 28 AIRLINE CRASHES EVERY DAY? THE NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION SAYS 28,437 COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS ARRIVE AND DEPART DAILY AT US AIRPORTS AND A 0.1% FAILURE RATE IS 28 PER DAY!

Marketing guru Ray Jutkins liked to talk about giving customers what they expect and most of us expect perfection.

At a 99.9% success rate, 470 entries would be spelled wrong in the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*, FedEx would deliver 3,300 packages to the wrong address every day. Every day 281 collisions would occur on the George Washington Bridge.

“Companies that don’t do so well try to sell price as a value. Instead of educating prospects and customers about value, they spend a lot of time and money talking about how cheap they are.”

Customers Expect Zero Defects

“THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF BUSINESS IS THAT EVERYONE HAS TO BECOME COMMITTED AND INVOLVED—FROM ENTRY-LEVEL IN THE BASEMENT TO THE OVAL OFFICE ON THE TOP FLOOR. IT MAY NOT BE A TWO-WAY STREET BUT CUSTOMERS EXPECT YOU TO BE COMMITTED TO STANDARDS, TO PERFORMANCE, TO SERVICE, TO QUALITY. IN RETURN YOU MAY GET NOTHING.”

That’s something Ray Jutkins told me near the beginning of the century and it’s just as true today. Perhaps even more so. Jutkins earned enough in Los Angeles to move to Roll, Arizona, 30 miles east of Yuma, where he lived at the end of a long dirt road and ran a consulting business that took

him to every continent but Antarctica. Ray died in 2005 but his progressive ideas about businesses and customers continue.

Ray liked to quote an advertisement: *Are you waiting for someone to lead and inspire you, for the boss to recognize you, for clients to thank you, for coworkers to help you, for the world to hail you? Well here’s a news flash: They are all just sitting there, too, waiting for you.*

Customers Expect Commitment

WHEN YOU GIVE 110%, YOU WILL NOT ALWAYS GET 110% BACK.

Loyalty is tough to build and tougher to keep. Loyalty is easy to promote (How many loyalty cards do you carry?) but retention is not necessarily the result. “The customer wants a commitment, so make it!” said Ray. You have no choice: Do it the way the customer wants and the customer might stick around. Fail to do it the way the customer wants and the customer will go away. This has nothing to do with right or wrong; it has everything to do with dialogue.

In fact, it’s not just commitment that’s expected. It’s extreme commitment. Customers

expect maximum performance, extreme service, and uncommon value. When you add value over and above their expectations, you win. You can’t just “get by” any more if you expect to survive, much less thrive, in today’s business climate.

And That Brings Us to Price

PRICE IS NOT A VALUE. SURVEYS ROUTINELY SHOW THAT PRICE IS NOT AN ISSUE WHEN EXTREME VALUE IS OFFERED. WHAT DOES YOUR CUSTOMER VALUE? CONVENIENCE STORES CHARGE HIGH PRICES, OFFER MEDIOCRE SERVICE, AND HAVE LIMITED SELECTIONS. THEY SUCCEED BECAUSE THEY OFFER THE VALUE OF CONVENIENCE. THE DEALERSHIP THAT SELLS HIGH-END CARS OFFERS PRESTIGE AND EXCLUSIVITY THAT COMES AT A HIGH PRICE.

After listening to Ray, I began to realize that the companies that don’t do so well try to sell price as a value. Instead of educating prospects and customers about value, they spend a lot of time and money talking about how cheap they are. Because these businesses cultivate cheap customers, they must keep wages low and cut corners on production. Underpaid workers don’t promote customer loyalty and neither do shoddy products that fail too soon.

The Customer Comes Second is the name of a book by Hal Rosenbluth and Diane Peters; that title stands the old “customer comes first” adage on its head and with good reason. Treat your employees poorly and they will treat your



customers poorly. Rosenbluth and Peters tell managers to encourage their people to treat one another like clients. One goal is to eliminate the *us-versus-them* attitude that can occur in any organization because this attitude then grows to an *us-versus-them* stance regarding customers.

An Unlikely Example

GOOD SERVICE STARTS AT THE TOP. I RECALL TAKING AN UPTOWN EXPRESS TRAIN IN NEW YORK CITY ONE SUMMER DAY SEVERAL YEARS AGO. THE TRAIN HAD BEEN DELAYED AND WHEN IT FINALLY ARRIVED AT TIMES SQUARE, IT WAS JAMMED..

Few people got off; a lot of people got on. The conductor made an announcement: “Sorry it’s a little crowded today, but this will give you an opportunity to get to know some of your fellow New Yorkers a little better. Thank you for riding with the MTA. Our next stop is 72nd and remember—wherever you go—happiness is the way.”

The conductor made essentially the same speech at 72nd, 96th, and 110th and each time he sounded genuinely happy to be doing the job he was doing. Some of the people on the crowded train even smiled a bit. He didn’t have to do that but he didn’t allow a difficult situation to ruin his day and he did everything he could to help passengers deal with the problem, too.

Here’s another example from New York City’s Metropolitan Transit Authority.

After decades of using the A Train and a special bus for service to JFK Airport, the MTA finally

completed its Air Train route, an 8-mile section that connects the subway system to the airport. It opened in December of 2003.

On one of my first trips to New York after the Air Train became operational, I noticed that the MTA had stationed an employee near the machines that dispense Air Train cards. I didn’t need any help with that but I did need a transit card for use on the subways and the Air Train machine didn’t dispense those.

When I asked the attendant, she escorted me to a second machine, watched to be certain that I obtained what I needed, and then made sure that I was able to tell the cards apart. If the MTA can achieve this kind of service, anybody should be able to!

But it’s not all perfection. On the Far Rockaway A train to back to JFK, the conductor muttered at each stop, “ThissFarRockawayTrain! StanClear-DaClosinDoors.” Helpful? Not exactly.

The MTA doesn’t have a lot of competition. If you want to travel from JFK to your hotel, you can take a cab (\$50 or so) or you can take the Air Train and the subway (\$5 for the Air Train and about \$2 for the subway if you buy a MetroCard). Being the frugal sort, I prefer the \$7 option.

If you live in New York City, you’ll use the subway frequently because it gets you where you need to go for about \$2 per trip. New Yorkers either love to hate the MTA or hate to love it.

Nobody at the MTA has to treat you well; you’ll be loyal because you don’t have a choice. Fortunately, some employees understand that good customer service makes life better for everyone.

Perfection and Complaints

DO YOUR BEST AND STILL CLIENTS COMPLAIN. HOW DISAPPOINTING! OR MAYBE NOT.

In *A Complaint is a Gift* Jamelle Barlow and Claus Møller make the case for welcoming complaints because they can enhance loyalty if they’re handled properly.

Some business writers describe the life-cycle of a customer in a fairy-tale scenario: Suspects are converted to prospects who become first-time buyers, then customers, loyal customers, and (sometimes) evangelists. And everybody lives happily ever after.

Except that they don’t. Satisfied customers leave. In fact, research suggests that it’s the satisfied customers who are most at risk of leaving.


But if someone engages with you to complain, they’re asking you to do better. After receiving several DVDs that wouldn’t play from Netflix, I called to see what was going on. Instead of just apologizing and sending a new copy, the person I spoke with apologized and promised to send the next two DVDs in my queue along with a new copy of the latest DVD that had failed.

“And I’ll open a ticket with the manager of our warehouse in Columbus so that we can determine what’s causing this problem,” she said.

A large bank conducted an extensive research project and found that people who have never had a complaint about the bank have an 82% likelihood of remaining with the bank and an 89% likelihood of recommending it. No surprise there.

But if a customer has had a complaint and the complaint was resolved in a positive manner, their likelihood of remaining with the bank increases to 87% and their likelihood of recommending the bank is 91%. A complaint really is a gift.

Although it’s difficult to juggle perfection and attitude, we’ve all dealt with a companies that do and you probably wonder why more companies can’t be like the few standouts.

What can you do to improve your company’s image right now? 



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