

SERVICE RECOVERY: THE ART OF BOUNCING BACK AND HIGHER

The acid test of service quality is how you solve customers' problems

In a perfect world of perfect products and performances, service recovery would be a nonsensical idea. But ours is not a perfect world, as we very well know. And whether you are serving customers face to face, over the phone, or via the Internet, these customers expect - and demand - redress when things go wrong. To the customer, the true test of an organization's commitment to service quality is not the stylishness of the pledges in its marketing literature nor the SMILEY badge that is worn on the uniform, but it is the way the organization responds when things go wrong.

Service recovery is a focused effort by a service provider to return aggrieved customers to a state of satisfaction with the institution after a service or product breakdown. Note carefully the phrase "to a state of satisfaction with the institution." Any customer contact person worth his or her salt can mollify an annoyed customer and calm a screaming, ranting, and raving one in short order. You have no doubt heard some version of this refrain from a self-preservation savvy service representative, "Oh, I know, it's just terrible. If it was up to me, I'd give you your money back right now, but they've got this policy and if I break it, well-you know!" That gets the service rep off the hook with the customer but does little to endear or retain the customer for the organization.

Service recovery is about keeping customers coming back after disaster strikes or even if just something annoying happens. In simple terms, recovery is the special effort customers expect you to put forward when things have gone a little-or a lot-wrong for them.

Effective service recovery that saves at-risk customers for the organization and becomes a competitive distinguisher is not an accident or a random act of will. It is, rather, a planned, systematic process. An effective service recovery system is more than an elaborate apology and monetary make-good effort designed to mollify upset customers, curry their favor, and, if necessary, buy back their business. The core attributes of an effective service recovery system are a clear problem-resolution process, a complaint and problem capture and analysis subsystem, and a way of feeding information on systematic problems back into the system to help reduce their occurrence. At the same time, effective recovery is a set of skillful, real-time actions taken by carefully selected individuals who are trained in the tact and diplomacy necessary to successfully manage an upset, disappointed or frightened customer. Successful recovery is the perfect blend of carefully thought-out processes and procedures and skillful, often spontaneous, actions. When done well, it can help right even the most grievous wrongs and save customers who already are the one step out the door towards your competitors.

Someone did say this: "GREAT SERVICE RECOVERY LOOKS AND FEELS LIKE MAGIC...MEMORABLE AND WOW!"

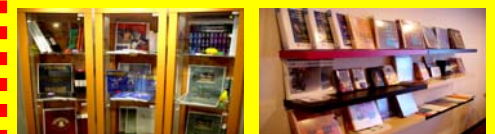
Dr. Allen Teh
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80% of customers' problems are caused by bad systems, not by bad people

-John Goodman (President, TARP Inc)