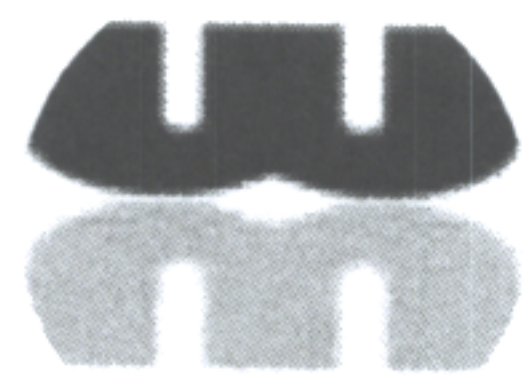114 views | Feb 7, 2020, 09:41am

Are Your Frontline People Killing Your Business?

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ForbesWomen

By Dianna Booher

Letting your employees communicate with your customers and prospects can kill your business. Let me be clear: Employees *should* be able to talk or write to customers. But when they say and do dumb things, customers and prospects will walk away.

Case in point: After 3 decades, I recently left leaving my wireless phone company. (You can't say I haven't been loyal!) But ongoing poor customer service communication and related policies have finally taken their toll. Here's the latest interaction:

I asked my husband, who works with me in my business, to call our wireless service company to get info on their newest small-business plan. In the middle of his phone conversation, I overhear what the rep was saying, so I introduce myself and ask the rep a question.

You may need to change these interactions.

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Rep: "I can't talk to you."

In fact, here's an earlier interaction with that same service provider. I noticed that they debited my checking account twice for the same monthly invoice. When I notified their customer service department, here's how that communication unfolded:

Rep: "We don't make billing mistakes. With our system, that doesn't happen."

Me: Well, it did happen. You debited my account on X date and then you debited it again a day later on Y date."

Rep: "You'll need to prove it."

Me: "Can't you investigate and see the double billing on your end?"

Rep: "No, *you'll* need to send us the appropriate documentation."

Me: "Fine. I'll send you the bank statement so you can see for yourself."

Rep: "No, that's not acceptable. You'll have to get your bank to send us a letter, noting the double billing."

Me: "Are you kidding? Your company made a mistake and you're asking me to do the work to go to my bank and persuade them to take the time to write you a letter?"

Rep: "Right. That's how it's done."

So the bank and I were forced to help them correct their mistake.

No doubt, you've experienced similar nonsensical and irrational communications with customer service agents. My question: Are you sure similar communication is not occurring with your own frontline? Your assistant? Your service partners?

How to Improve Employee Interactions With Customers and Prospects

Change "No problem." to "You're welcome. Glad to help."

Make Sure Employees Understand Your Policies and the Reasons Behind Them

Had the phone company rep known the reason behind the "I can't talk to you" issue mentioned earlier, he would have understood the policy's purpose was to ensure accou ownership and privacy. Then he could have simply asked me for information to verify my account ownership.

But absent that policy purpose, the agent responded like a robot.

Eliminate "Side Conversations" With Coworkers

When I posted the above phone-company interaction on Facebook, friends replied with a plethora of equally shocking experiences. Among those most often shared was the irritation of employees talking (often whining) to coworkers *while* completing the customer transaction.

Example comments: "How long before you go on a break?" "What time is Jill getting back from lunch?" "So how did you like the party last weekend?" "Did you see that old man with that weird hair?"

Your customers need the full attention of those trying to complete a transaction—not tl backstory on the rep's vacation.

Change the Body Language

Employees should not talk, move, sit, or stand as if they're on their way to the dentist fe a root canal. (And yes, callers can *hear* poor body language over the phone. Slumping affects both the tone and volume of the voice.)

Some reps sound angry; many look exhausted—as if handling one more interaction would push them over the edge.

Slouchy body language, mumbled replies and directions, or dismissive facial expressior communicate negative things: job dissatisfaction, laziness, arrogance, or boredom. None of this body language encourages repeat business.

Improve Their Word Choices

Common examples of poor word choice include these all-too-familiar comments:

——''You'll have to fill out the form before I can help you." (versus "Would you please fil out this form so I can help you.")

——"What proof do you have?" (versus "Can you please provide X so we can get this issu resolved promptly.")

——"No problem." (versus "You're welcome. Glad to help.")

——"Tell me your complaint again." (versus "Would you mind restating your concern again to make sure I understand fully, so we can get a prompt resolution.")

Leaders, if you're wondering why your business isn't booming, consider listening to an observing frontline communication.

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 48 books. Her newest is Faster, Fewer, Better Emails. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and @DiannaBooher.

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