The Customer’s Role in Customer Service
By L. Douglas Mault

In this, the second of six articles, we see that the customer plays a vital role in your businesses every day. Without the customer, you would have no reason, in fact, no ability, to exist. When you do business with a customer, you and they incur certain contractual obligations.

In contemporary commercial law there is a great deal of noise about product quality delivery, warranties and guarantees, pricing and so on. There is a great deal of silence regarding customer service.

With the exception of being sure they pay their bills, there is no role you can require or demand customers to play in customer service. Yet you can enlist them in the process. Let’s look at some ways to accomplish this.

Establish a formal customer round-table or focus group. Give the group a clear mission and spell out the charter and their level of authority in implementing change.

Encourage customer complaints. That is not to say to encourage them to complain as a matter of course. It means you will be receptive to hearing legitimate complaints and handling them with alacrity. This is a key way to save an old customer and to avoid having to find a new one.

Actively call or visit customers who no longer deal with you. Ask them why they’ve become inactive. Make it clear that you are not pressuring them to return but rather seeking to remedy any inherent problems in your company.

Randomly sample your customers by phone to ask them what they like and dislike about your product or services. Don’t assume that because they buy from you that they are fully satisfied with your company. Be sure to get a broad response by contacting long-time and new, young and old, local and distant, urban, suburban and rural customers.

Schedule customer visits, the announced purpose of which is to learn how the customer uses your product or services. Advise them that your intent is to organize to serve them at the highest and most effective level.

Get production, support and other inside people in front of customers so that they can get direct feedback. This should enhance their performance and their level of delivered customer service.

Remember that the customer is under no obligation to participate or to give you the feedback you desire and need. They will do so only if you show them what is in it for them if they do, then all you have to do is deliver what you have promised.

About the Author
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