

## **A “Less than Impressive” Customer Experience by Sheryl Imhoff**

Recently, our cable TV remote control went on the blink. We tried new batteries, but to no avail. My husband decided to go to the cable company store and get a new remote. The closest store was about 15 miles from our house.

With the new (actually recycled) remote in hand, my husband programmed it according to the direction sheet. Everything seemed to work except for the List, Rewind and Last buttons. He programmed it a few more times, but these functions still did not work.

I called customer service, maneuvered through the phone options and waited 22 minutes for a live person. A very polite, helpful representative walked me through the remote programming. She offered several codes to enter and after about 20 minutes, she decided the remote was not working properly. She suggested I return it for another remote. She did offer to have a technician bring a replacement remote to our home, but the earliest time for that appointment would be in two days.

Two days without a fully functional remote? Having a remote that worked suddenly became a priority. Are we spoiled or what? Without the List function, we couldn't watch the shows we had recorded on our DVR. We love our DVR. We panicked and decided we needed to get a remote that worked asap!

I rushed out to the store which was located in a shopping mall. I didn't feel too inconvenienced at this point, but I hoped there wouldn't be a long waiting line. When I arrived at the store, there was no one in line. I approached the clerk and explained the situation, including the help I received over the phone from the customer service representative. He took the remote and walked me over to a TV. He deftly pushed all the buttons and did some fast programming. He said, "See, all the buttons work," and he handed the remote back to me.

I asked what he did and he quickly explained, saying he wasn't sure why the customer service rep wasn't able to help me. Although I saw that the remote now seemed to work, I didn't trust it. I asked him if I could have a different one. He rolled his eyes and went to retrieve another remote. He pushed the "new" remote across the counter to me, obviously unhappy with my request.

My past experiences have taught me some important lessons, such as, make sure it works before you take it home. I asked him to test this "new" remote on the TV before I left. "What difference will that make?" he said. "I showed you this other one worked, but you didn't believe me."

Ouch! His attitude slapped me right in the face. He thought I was stupid or demanding or a pain in the neck or all three. Up to this point, my experience hadn't really been negative, but now I was irritated and offended.

"I would still like you to show me that this remote is programmed correctly and that it works," I stated. He grudgingly stomped over to the TV, flipped through the buttons and proved his point.

I took the remote, said "Thanks" and left. As I exited the store, I glanced back at the man. He was staring at me with a contemptuous look that said, "I'm glad she's gone." I stared back at him with a look that said, "I can't believe you just treated me that way."

I drove to meet some friends for dinner and the first thing I told them about was my awful experience with the cable company.

So, what is customer experience? It's the sum total of the interactions a customer has with your products, people and processes - both the tangibles and intangibles.

A business delivers customer experiences every minute of every day – face-to-face, online, over the phone, in a store, through the media and by word-of-mouth. An experience may last a few seconds or a lifetime, but in either case, the customer is left with an impression, a feeling, an emotional reaction.

If you own a business, ask yourself these questions...

- Is your customer experience strategically designed or is it left to chance?
- Do you deliver memorable moments or can customers get the same experience from your competitors?
- Are all of your employees focused on providing a great customer experience or only your front-line people?

A well-designed customer experience is the foundational platform of your business. It is the key ingredient for a clear, actionable strategy and an indicator of a company's health.

Although my experience had some positive touch points, there are several value gaps, places with holes rich with opportunities. Let's examine my experience.

- The directions that came with the remote were comprehensive, but a bit overwhelming. No phone number or Web site are included for customers who have questions or difficulties. Very inconvenient and frustrating when you need help.
- Since I've called the cable company many times in the past (I have their number memorized), I expected a long wait time. However, sometimes I'm offered the option of having the company call me back instead of me staying on hold. This option was not given to me in this experience. If it had been, I could have spend my time more effectively.
- The customer service rep offered several options that did not solve my problem. A customer service rep with comprehensive training and troubleshooting skills could have saved me time, energy and aggrevation.
- My interaction with the employee at the store was disturbing. He did his job, but was disrespectful and uncooperative. While he did solve my issue with the remote, he acted as if I was interupting his day with my petty problem.

The result: Even though some touch points along my experience journey were adequate, my overall experience was negative. This was a far cry from a superior customer experience. If I felt I had a viable option, I would find another cable provider.

**Designing a superior customer experience is the next competitive frontier.**

