



Service Recovery: It's Not Just A Fruit Basket Band-Aid
AN IGNITE WHITE PAPER

August 2010

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Service Recovery: It's in The Solution, not the Fruit Basket Band-Aid

Picture this: you are sitting in a Florida hotel lobby with a clear view of the front desk. You notice a very angry guest (you can tell by his demeanor) walking across the lobby and approach the front desk agent. He states that he is very upset because the AC is not working in his room (it's 110 degrees in the shade outside) and he was told that a service engineer could not come to his room for 20 minutes; he is expecting a very important business call in 15 minutes and he wants to be in his room for this private conversation.

The front desk agent does admit that the hotel is 100% occupied and she cannot provide another room; she apologizes profusely (a number of times), but does not provide any solution for this guest. He wanted to know if that was all she could do - APOLOGIZE! Amazingly, she apologizes again and he stalks away even angrier than when the conversation began.

I then hear the front desk agent ask a colleague: **"Do you think we should send him a fruit basket?"**

Obviously, this is a service recovery scenario where the recovery just didn't happen. The front desk agent did not ask any pertinent questions (Would his call come through the hotel operator or was he using a cell phone? Would another private setting work for his call?). At the heart of the situation is that the front desk agent did not empathize with the guest, nor provide

any real solution for him. Unfortunately, the fruit basket band-aid (or your company's version of it) is offered so often, instead of any real solution for the customer. In this scenario, the front desk agent had a range of solutions which could have been provided to the guest:

- ✳ *She could have sent a fan to his room and then had Room Service deliver a pitcher of ice water for him.*
- ✳ *There was a very nice, air-conditioned lounge off the lobby, which didn't open until 4pm. It was 11am, and she could have offered the lounge to the guest and told him that the hotel operator would direct his call to the extension there.*
- ✳ *Frankly, she could have offered any manager's private office whether he was using his cell, or waiting for the call to be directed to the operator.*

Instead, her solution was the fruit basket band-aid. With this option, not only would he be uncomfortable in his room, where the AC was not working, but now he would have the indubitable pleasure of having fruit and cheese smelling and sweating in the room.

One might suggest that there was a "common sense" response that was needed here. I have decided, in my 30+ years of managing and consulting, that you cannot train people to have common sense. My cousin has two doctorates, but not a lick of common sense! I do believe, however, that you can train people in the skill of Active

Listening, which for me is the most critical skill in service recovery and truthfully, in life in general.

Some of the basic skills of Active Listening are:

- ✳ *Making direct eye contact.*
- ✳ *Stilling your internal voice to insure that you are mentally present, alert and attentive.*
- ✳ *Restating the speaker's main points to insure that you heard correctly.*
- ✳ *Reflecting on the speaker's emotions, so that he/she knows that you care about what he/she is saying (this is a key skill in service recovery).*
- ✳ *Asking questions to ensure that you gain a perspective on the speaker's view.*
- ✳ *Summarizing the conversation, so that you and the speaker are both clear and on the same page.*
- ✳ *Taking action based on the outcomes of the conversation.*

If you try these skills in conversations with your colleagues, your significant other, your children - your disappointed or angry customer - you will be amazingly gratified by the true nature of the dialogue.

So, training your people on active listening is a crucial component in their ability to practice service recovery successfully and with more confidence.

Frankly, it is just one facet of your customer care strategy, because no



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one believes that there is a perfect organization out there, where failure to meet customer concerns never happens. In your initial training or your onboarding process, communication basics, active listening, and dealing with challenging customer situations are integral sessions that should be included. These are life skills, as well as work skills, and your team members will gain confidence and assertion from mastering them, and ultimately using them effectively in the workplace and at home. Your staff will appreciate your willingness to assist them in practicing these critical skills, as a measure of their development in your organization.

In tandem with active listening skills, at Ignite, we believe that you must provide your team members with specific tools to assist them in the service recovery process. There are many available, but we believe that the simpler, the better. We have chosen a proven four-step model that will help your employees to frame those conversations that they have with difficult and challenging customers and come out successfully on the other side (even with the most irate clients or customers). Here are the steps to follow to create solutions for your clients or customers who have experienced service failure:

✦ **(Step 1) Listen:**

- Pay attention, as if it's the first time that you've heard this problem.
- Do not interrupt; listen first to understand, not to probe.
- Maintain eye contact.

- Do not take the situation personally.

✦ **(Step 2) Apologize:**

- Be sincere and deal with the person's feelings first.
- Empathize and express that you're sorry that the problem occurred.
- Recognize the customer's disappointment, but do not explain why the problem occurred.

✦ **(Step 3) Solve:**

- Ask clarifying/probing questions.
- Tell the customer what you CAN do; display confidence.
- Summarize, offer alternatives and act on the agreed-upon solution; get help if needed
- Follow-up if necessary

✦ **(Step 4) Thank:**

- Thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention.
- Thank the customer for his/her patience and understanding.
- Thank the customer for working with you to solve the problem.

Obviously, the scenario with the front desk agent would have played out quite differently, if she had followed this framework. So, an apology is necessary, but if it is not followed up



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with action and solution, customers go away feeling dissatisfied and uncared for. If you want to create “lasting” relationships with your customers and clients, and gain their true loyalty and respect, we suggest that you try the **L.A.S.T.** technique.

Again, this training should be a part of your overall customer care strategy/philosophy. And concerning the actions that your team members will take to solve the customer’s problem – are they empowered to take actions for your customers without repercussions from the company leadership? An empowered workforce?...hmm...this could be the subject of a whole other white paper!

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”
---**Stephen Covey**

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