



STORIES TRAINERS TELL

I Was Aching For a Fight

Contributor

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Marcy has more than twenty-eight years of industry experience with leading firms: Procter and Gamble, Royal Dutch Shell, and Sapient. Most recently, Marcy's experience has centered on the design and development of new technical joint ventures. She is now working with eLilly. Marcy possesses strong functional and technical knowledge in organization design and development, corporate and business strategy, self-managed and virtual work teams, change management, joint venture partner selection, globalization, leadership development, coaching, and manufacturing management. She holds a B.S. degree in industrial management and computer science from Purdue University and an M.S. degree in human resource and organization development from the University of San Francisco.

Type and Purpose(s)

Imbroglia; evaluate and explore

Background

Prior to this incident, Marcy had had several negative customer experiences with this department store, as outlined here. It was these experiences that led to her response.

Presentation Tips

Portray Marcy as angry and ready for a fight and the store clerk as cool, calm, and collected.

Set-up

Option 1—How do you prepare for the possibility of confrontation?

Option 2—Catching someone off balance can impact the outcome of an interaction.

I Was Aching For a Fight







One day while fixing the garbage disposal, I broke the allen wrench that I had just purchased at a major department store. Given the hassles I'd experienced in the past with this store, I got myself really angry and really pumped up. Not more than two months earlier, it took five phone calls to get a repairman out to the house to do warranty work on my new garage door opener. First, he missed two appointments. And then when he finally did show up, he said, "I'm not leaving until you pay me!" The nerve of that guy! I had to place a call to the store manager to get him to leave my house.

And then there was the incident with my new refrigerator. I carefully measured the size of the opening for it—even checked it twice! Three weeks after I ordered it, it came alright—only it was two sizes wider than what I'd ordered. The delivery guys wouldn't even help me put my old refrigerator back in place. When I called about the mishap, customer service said they sent the larger model because the one I wanted was on back order. Finally, four weeks after the wrong model was sent, I got the refrigerator I wanted.




When I got in the car, I knew I was in for a fight. Defiantly, I walked into the store and over to the hardware department and boldly set the tool on the counter. Ready for an argument, I gave the clerk my story. "My new garbage disposal seized up on me. So I got the booklet that came with it and found the instructions on how to fix the damn thing. I put this wrench exactly where it tells you to and pushed hard—just like it said to do. Look at this thing—it snapped in two, right in my hand. See the bruise I got? My hand flew back and hit the back of the cupboard." In a very pleasant manner, she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'd be happy to replace the wrench for you." Her response took all the air out of me. I was so surprised that I didn't quite know how to respond. In fact, I actually tried to start an argument with this woman about giving me a new allen wrench. I was convinced that returning the tool would be a difficult situation. She just kept saying, "No, ma'am. Really. I want to replace it." And she did. How could I have known that I would leave with two gifts: the new allen wrench and the experience of being treated well despite my best efforts to pick a fight?

When faced with angry customers, “go for the gift.” Search for the opportunity to extend a higher level of service. While it may be a challenge—in the moment—to treat customers better than they’re treating you, it is truly a gift you can—and need to—give them in order to recover the situation. Try it the next time you have an angry customer.

Debrief Questions

-  How did Marcy’s expectations influence her actions during this encounter?
-  What did Marcy learn from this experience? How did her expectations change?
-  What did the service provider do to defuse a potentially difficult situation?
-  When have you had to go beyond the basic customer service response to provide a more advanced level of service? How did you handle that situation?
-  What might customers be feeling if they were not able to have the fight they prepared for?
-  How can you ensure that your customers are satisfied?

Key: Three Levels of Debrief Questions

-  **The Story:** What the story means—its moral or main lesson. What the story characters have experienced.
-  **The Learner:** How the participant feels about the story and how it personally applies to the individual.
-  **The Organization or World:** How the story applies to the participant’s work group, department, business unit, division, organization, industry, or to society-at-large.

Key Point Options

1. As customers, we have to be careful how we prepare ourselves for potential conflict because we may not be paying attention to what is going on in the moment. Thus, we may miss the opportunity to resolve a conflict before it escalates.
2. As service providers we need to realize that even when a customer problem is handled skillfully, customers may or may not be able to let go of the anger they are feeling. Customers may need to tell their story and get angry. At that point, our job is to listen fully and let them vent. Before customers can be moved to a problem-solving mode, they may need to get angry, verbalize their feelings, and believe that they carried out what they had planned. The subtlety of providing this type of support is really an advanced level of customer service skill.
3. Customer follow-up can help ensure that a customer truly is satisfied with the outcome of a complaint. Do not be afraid to ask customers what they want, what would make the situation better, and what they expect of you and others.

Follow-up Activities

Step 1—Role-play: In groups of three, practice defusing difficult customer situations. Rotate the roles of Customer, Service Provider, and Observer. The Customer should select a situation that has happened frequently or is difficult to handle, introduce the problem, and play the role. The Service Provider should handle the Customer's problem as skillfully as he or she can, with a goal of providing exceptional service and defusing the Customer's anger. The Observer should notice the skills the Service Provider uses and the impact on the Customer.

Step 2—Small-Group Discussion: After each role-play, discuss what the Service Provider did well and might do differently. How did the Customer feel at the end of the role-play?

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