

Is Your Business Operating Like a Trauma Center?

By Richard F. Libin, President, APB
rllibin@apb.cc, www.apb.cc



It's easy to get caught up in the mechanics, the daily routine of doing business and forget the reason for being in business in the first place – customers. This is a common

occurrence regardless of the industry, product, service or business. Salespeople and customer support teams become reactive and fail to check in with their customers simply to see how things are going. As a result, companies end up performing what we call, Customer Service Triage. Sales and service professionals race from one trauma to another, sorting and grouping customer service issues based on their need. They address those that need immediate attention first and then “get to” the others. This is exactly the opposite of where every business wants to be.

Every business has the ability to avoid this virtually 100% of the time. Who knew? Businesses that proactively perform regular Customer Service Check-ups can ensure that their customer interaction processes are used consistently and properly. More important, they can judge how effective they are and make adjustments. These routine check-ups provide a unique opportunity to talk to customers and get first-hand feedback on how they are really performing.

Minimally, Customer Service Check-ups must happen every quarter. They must cover every possible point of contact with a customer, from their first encounter – in person or online – to the sales process, post-sales support and marketing. In essence, businesses must ask, “Are we truly putting our customers, our greatest asset, first?” While these check-ups must be comprehensive, they can't be complex or lengthy. Following these six steps will secure the information you need.

Step One: Are customer handling processes and excellence in customer service part of the business culture?

Each employee, starting with the top level of management, must treat customer service as an integral part of their job. Customer service should be

as routine as breathing. The process doesn't need to be complicated; often it's the small things that customers remember. For instance:

- A phone call returned on time
- A polite, sincere greeting or smile
- A thank you note
- A friendly greeting from every employee in every interaction
- Knowing their name on sight

Making a customer feel welcome and appreciated is critical. It's everyone's job, whether on the phone, in person or online. It doesn't matter if it's “your” customer, help them and then update their account executive on what transpired. An effective customer handling processes includes a method for accurately collecting and recording specific, standardized data for every customer.

Step Two: Are you responding quickly and personally to every customer?

Everyone in a business has the ability to respond quickly and personally to every customer. Think about it from their perspective. Imagine how you'd like to be treated, as a customer and then act accordingly. Are sales teams calling customers to check on their satisfaction? Being proactive is equally important as reacting to their concerns and questions and often prevents problems before they happen. Be certain that your processes capture every interaction so future customer inquiries can be responded to quickly and with accurate information. Disconnect your automatic email response to inquiries. Respond personally to every inquiry within 24 hours or less.

Step Three: Do you communicate proactively with your customers?

Communication is essential to keeping customers and leveraging them as references. Keeping customers apprised of the status of their order is critical. Customer handling processes should clearly define the steps to take if changes occur that can impact customer satisfaction. If a customer's order is delayed, let them know as soon as possible. Do you send out newsletters with updates, news and other information? Is the customer data on file used to prospect?

Stop Watching Your Profits Walk Out The Door

Step Four: Are you visibly and continuously appreciating your customers?

Do customers who come to your business feel welcome? Are simple amenities provided like coffee, water and a pleasant seating area? Do you keep a basket of toys handy just in case children come along with their parents? Fewer distractions result in a more positive experience and ultimately in more sales. Most important, do you thank the customer – for their visit, interest, time and for the sale?

Step Five: Do you ask customers for feedback and act on it?

Check the processes that are designed to capture customer feedback. Are you sending postage-paid response cards or an e-mail asking about their experience? How often is their input invited? What happens to the feedback that comes in? Do you change the customer handling processes to better meet the needs of all customers based on the direct feedback? Do you thank customers who help you make a difference?

Step Six: Are you continually learning new ways to deliver excellent service?

While customer service is every employee's responsibility, it begins with management. Not only are managers responsible for teaching first-rate customer service skills, but as leaders, they must demonstrate these behaviors as role models for employees.

Quarterly Customer Service Check-ups not only allow companies to evaluate their **customer** service and customer handling processes, but they enable them to see if these processes are being used consistently. Armed with this data, management can make intelligent decisions on how to improve every customer's experience instead of focusing on management customer traumas.



Richard F. Libin has written two acclaimed books that help people of all walks of life improve their sales skills, because as he says, “everyone is a selling something.” His most recent book, Who Knew? (Who-Knew.com), was published in early 2017. His first book, “Who Stopped the

Sale?” (WhoStoppedTheSale.com), is now in its second edition. As president of APB-Automotive Profit Builders, Inc., a firm with more than 48 years experience working with both sales and service professionals, he helps his clientele, through personnel development and technology, to build customer satisfaction and maximize gross profits in their businesses. Mr. Libin can be reached at rllibin@apb.cc or 508-626-9200 or www.apb.cc.