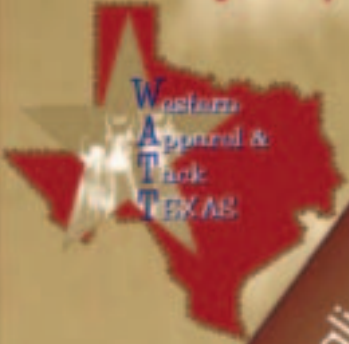


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Business sense



By Jeff Jones
Business Editor

Customer Experience

W

hat do my customers experience? That's the question I was asking myself recently, after two great and two not-so-great customer service experiences. Here are the stories as they unfolded for me:

The first experience was at a Hampton Inn where I was staying for the weekend. I was greeted by Johnny N. at the check-in desk. Greeted may not actually be the right word. This man appeared so full of happiness that he wanted to share some of it with me. His welcome was like an invitation to a party and he was contagiously upbeat. I asked him if there was a pizza place that would deliver to the hotel. He said he was new to the area, but would call in five minutes and let me know. Even faster than promised, I had a typed list of local restaurants, including three pizza places that delivered. What are your employees doing?

Next was Dick's Sporting Goods. My son needed new shoes and athletic gear and I quickly spent \$265. I got home and discovered that I had an e-mail with a 20-percent-off coupon from an online competitor. I called Dick's, explained the situation and asked if they would match the offer. The clerk said yes, so the next day I showed up with the merchandise, my receipt and a printed copy of the offer. I was then told that they wouldn't match the deal, since the coupon wasn't for a specific product. I asked, just to make sure, if they were telling me that they would let \$200 worth of business walk out of their store to be used at a competitor. Apparently their policy was firm. What policies do you enforce that prevent employees from making sales?

The third experience occurred at Chili's restaurant. We entered with two semi-obnoxious 12-year-old boys, fresh from a baseball game. The boys wanted to sit at a different table and I couldn't imagine what the waitress would think of working two tables for one tip. Not only was she spectacularly friendly and helpful, but when a mistake was made on our credit card, she brought the manager to the table to help explain what had happened and gave us the General Manager's business card so we could call if anything appeared out of order on our statements. I'll be back asking for the same waitress and willing to tip generously. What are your employees doing?

The final experience was at Hibbett Sports. I walked in and saw two employees steadfastly making sure the counter didn't escape. I received the standard "can I help you?" and said "no thanks, I'm just looking." They were very good about giving me plenty of space. I found an item similar to what I needed, so I walked across the store (since the employees were obviously not coming to me) and asked for another color I had seen on the manufacturer's web site. One employee who thought she should try to sell something said she could order it from the manufacturer, to which the second employee responded "no we can't." The first employee then suggested they could have it transferred from another store, to which the second employee quickly responded, "Yeah, we can, but it will probably take 4-6 weeks. You can probably get it somewhere else quicker." Guess what? That's just what I did! What are your employees saying?

I challenge you to find out what your customers are experiencing. When they walk out your doors, what are they thinking? Will they gladly return or will they tell others why they aren't coming back? Find out today because tomorrow depends on it.