

Transforming Customer Disputes Into Service Opportunity (Part 2)

In this issue, let me share Meta's Care principles as well as Five Practical Tips in Transforming Customer Disputes.

1. Consider Complaints Carefully

Complaints should be taken seriously. They provide good feedback for us. Consider them carefully. Get as many facts as possible and encourage customers to share their perspectives freely.

Active listening is a required core skill here. We do this both verbally and nonverbally. Verbally, we do it by asking relevant questions and by rephrasing their perspectives. Nonverbally, we show we consider their complaints carefully by leaning forward, making eye contact, nodding appropriately and jotting down their complaints.

2. Acknowledge Sincerely

Having heard the disputes, it is important to acknowledge. We do this by paraphrasing their facts and feelings to make sure that we have understood what has been communicated. We also summarize their perspectives of the situation so that we prioritize their issues and what they see ought to be done. Sincerity is the key. Customers can detect our lack of it a kilometer away.

We need to make an important distinction between acknowledgement and agreement. We need to acknowledge the customers' perspectives but may not be agreeing with their assessment of the situation.

As someone has rightly put it, "Customers are not always right but they are always important."

3. Respond Calmly

Customers are at times upset and angry. The simple rule is: Don't give tit for tat. Don't play their games. Getting upset with them only makes it worse. Instead, stay focused on the issue. Self-control is the key. When we find ourselves getting heated, take a quick breather or find someone who can manage it better. You cannot control everything that happens to you but you can control what is happening inside you and how you respond to it.

Learning how to manage angry customers' emotions is critical.

4. Explain Actions Clearly

Explaining what we intend to do is an important next step in handling customers' disputes. Managing their expectations is important. Don't over promise and under deliver. It is better to under promise and over deliver.

If disputes had to be referred to someone higher, it is good to explain why. If investigation needs to be done, it is good to explain why.

Communication about our course of actions is critical.

Five Practical Tips on Transforming Disputes

1. Deal with it promptly

Sometimes, we do face nasty customers. We are afraid. We avoid them. We don't deal with the dispute promptly. Remember: The longer the delay, the worse it will become. Responsiveness is a mark of great service transformation. Timeliness is the key. How fast we respond shows how important the customer is to us.

2. Fix the problem not find blame

When there's a dispute, ask yourself, "Am I trying to fix the problem or am I fixing the blame?" Focus on the problem first. Sometimes, managers tend to spend inordinate amount of time trying to find out what went wrong and then forget to deal with the customer complaint.

3. Communicate, communicate, communicate

Too often, we don't communicate enough with our customers. If more time is needed to resolve the issue, we keep mums about it. When there is a delay in the investigation, let them know what has been done and the reasons for the delay.

We expect customers to understand our predicament. Remember, no communication is communication: it shows that we don't care for the customer or that the customer is not important to us.

In the absence of feedback, customers usually make up their own reality. It is always wise to keep them in the loop.

This only happens when there is a good customer feedback system in the organization. So, work on it.

4. Watch your body language

As Leslie Charles puts it, "A polite 'No' is better than a rude 'Yes'. It is not what we say but how we say it. A grumpy face, an offensive gesture, a frown eyebrow, an indifferent slouch – all these speak louder than words. We usually

recommend in our service training to get service providers to see themselves in the mirror and ask, “Do people want to be served by me?”

5. Have a Good Close

Even if the dispute cannot be resolved to the customers’ satisfaction, have a good close. Work towards helping customers feeling better than when they walked in. We may not succeed every time but if we have been consistent and sincere in treating most of our customers well, the odd unreasonable customer will never erode your reputation. End the conversation well. A good closure is always better than a bad beginning.

One final thought, in the final analysis, customers remember people over product. “You” can make the difference.

John Ng, *Ph.D*
President
Meta

Tel: (65) 6419 5255
Fax: (65) 6227 7170
Email: john@meta.com.sg

Copyright © Meta Pte Ltd

For past articles on MetaTrends, please log in www.meta.com.sg

Disputes are common in the service industry. Why & How do you transform disputes into opportunities. Read ***Transforming Customer Disputes into Service Opportunity (Part 1)***.

It is not good enough to have service excellence. Service innovation is the way to deliver value. Read ***Beyond Service Excellence to Service Innovation***

The difference between a company & its competitor is execution. Why it is important? Read ***Execution: Making Things Happen***