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Serving Our Two Sets of Customers

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How do you respond to good service from people and companies you do business with? Are you likely to let them know how much you appreciate what they have done for you? Or, do you just take excellent service for granted and simply take your business elsewhere when problems or negative situations arise?

These are especially important questions for us in the radio business due to the often-repeated axiom: we have TWO sets of consumers with very different needs that often mean that excellent service to one of the two creates poorer service for the other one.

For example, from a decade ago: when KMPS, Seattle, decided to go to one ten minute stopset per hour during the spring 1994 ARB survey and sweep all four quarter hours with 50 minutes of non-stop music, they got a very good monthly time spent listening Arbitrend from their listener-customers that seemed to say "we love the fact that you're now stopping only once an hour for commercials."

As you may know, they also heard from their advertiser customers: "aren't folks simply tuning out when the commercials begin?" "what about rotation of our times?" "will my spot, buried deep inside ten commercials in a row, be heard?"

The station returned to "12 in a row" and two five unit stopsets per hour in less than a month.

This is an extreme example, but - face it - we are constantly in that gray area between listener-customer needs and advertiser-customer desires, and the difference between the winners and the losers is how well stations stay in touch with both in spite of the fact that they can never give either 110% of what they like.

In general, claims longtime sales executive and Speaker's Hall of Fame member Al Walker - a specialist in helping organizations increase productivity and solve problems (Walker and Associates, <http://www.alwalker.com/>, 800 255-1982):

- ♦ for every person who bothers to complain, there are 26 others who remain silent.
- ♦ the average 'wronged' client or listener will tell eight to 16 other people. Over 10% will tell more than 20 people.
- ♦ 91% of unhappy clients or listeners will *never* use your service again.
- ♦ If you make an effort to remedy complaints, between 82% and 95% of the complaining listeners or customers will stay with you.
- ♦ It costs about FIVE times as much to attract a new listener or advertiser than it does to keep an old one.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STAFF AND YOURSELF

1. How well do we listen to our listeners and our clients?
2. Do we have a method for measuring customer satisfaction?
3. In what ways do you respond quickly to client/listener needs and complaints?
4. What are "small touches" you use to make listeners and advertisers feel special?
5. In what ways do you motivate and encourage your staff to excel in service?

There are three key components to effective customer service:

Knowledge. Learn how well you are doing by systematically ASKING customers and listeners how they feel about your service. This is called 'research,' and the increasing number of pre-sale due diligence strategic studies as stations change hands and the trend toward 'advertiser attitudinal/perceptual' studies by major research companies in our industry is an indicator that both quantitative and qualitative data are becoming more important to stay up with your competition in the race to keep our two sets of customers happy.

Skill. The Golden Rule applies here. Treat your listeners and your advertisers the way you would want to be treated. Teach your employees how you want to be treated both as a listener and as a client. Build confidence so that they can handle difficult situations promptly, on the spot.

Attitude. Inspire your clients/listeners to have confidence in you. The key to this is genuinely MEANING it. Do you feel the same way about your listeners and your customers as you do about other people who are important in your life? Imagine that a VIP was coming to visit your radio station. What would you do differently? Would you clean the place up? Put forth extra effort?

Make a list of the things you'd do for that VIP and then do the same thing for your 'customers' on a daily basis. Treat your advertisers and your listeners so well that if they are asked by a friend to recommend a radio station, your name will be the only one that comes to mind.

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Complaining customers or listeners are passionate. Use their complaint as an opportunity to build on that passion, change that negative to a positive feeling for you.

1. Use the complainer's name frequently as you talk to him or her.
2. Ask: 'exactly what is the problem?' AND 'what else is wrong?' Keep digging until you are confident that you have uncovered all hidden negatives.
3. Really, really listen to what they say. Don't try to reach solutions until you are sure that you have heard 100% of what he/she is saying.
4. Thank the person for bringing the complaint. No matter how trivial it seems to you, you must take the complaint seriously - as a chance to (literally) improve your business.
5. Apologize. What are you apologizing for? Not only what happened, but also for the inconvenience it caused. Most clients feel that making a complaint creates an adversarial situation. Diffuse that by assuring them that their comment, suggestion and opinions are very important to you.

6. The temptation now is to say 'here's what we're going to do about that.' Instead, ask the listener or advertiser 'what do you want us to do about this?' Let the person tell you what will make him happy. If it's possible, DO what he/she wants and even a little bit more. Add value to the situation. Occasionally, people will ask for less than what you were going to do. If so, do what they suggest PLUS what you had intended to do in the first place. That little something extra will turn this complainer into a walking advertisement for you! A well-handled problem instills more loyalty into the relationship than your complainer had prior to the complaint!
7. Take immediate action. Never leave a complaint hanging. If you do, it will get worse and customers' demands will become greater.
8. Do what it takes to leave the listener/customer happy. It's worth it to sacrifice a little profit now to keep a client. Chalk it up to marketing expense, because that's exactly what it is when your listeners and advertisers become missionaries for YOU.

Axiomatic: long term success requires both sets of radio's customers to be, at the very least, satisfied and, even better, consistently delighted with our service.

Systematically dedicate your sales people and your programming staff to these principles, helping both departments understand that often the conflicts between the two of them are symptoms of this dedication at work.

Astonish your listeners and your advertisers with your dedication to these principles.