

Making A Wrong Right

How to Handle Irate Internal Customers

When was the last time you made a mistake at work? Come on, you know you've done it; we all have. No matter how good we are at our jobs, there will come a time when we will screw up.

It's what you do after that mistake, however, that determines how others view you and how you feel about yourself. Think back to that last mistake. How did you handle it? Did you take responsibility for it? Or, did you lie about it? If you did the first, how did your boss or co-workers respond? If you did the second, how did you feel about yourself and how others might perceive you?

Your coworkers and boss are your customers, and you must treat them and your dealings with them just as you would any other customer. You must be honest and respectful. And, when you make a mistake, you must take the same steps to make that wrong right. Those steps are the same ones you would take when dealing with customers who walk through the doors to your company, but with a few twists.

- **Take responsibility.** It's human nature to want to blame someone else for a mistake, or to deny that a mistake was made. We are afraid that, by owning up to the problem, we will lose face, or possibly lose our jobs. Sure, there is a chance that you will be reprimanded, but just as taking responsibility for an error diffuses a customer's anger and frustration, it will do so with your boss or coworkers.
- **Act quickly.** Resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Don't try to cover up a mistake, or run from it. When you admit to an error immediately, you will have the opportunity to



take the action necessary to correct it. In the process, you will not add to the negative consequences of that mistake by delaying any corrective action necessary to correct it. In this, as in many cases, time is money.

- **Be empowered.** Analyze the mistake—what you did and what you need to do to correct it. Develop a plan of action to make things right and then present that plan to those people who have been impacted by that mistake. When you are proactive, you will earn the respect of others by acknowledging that you made a mistake and doing whatever needs to be done to deal with it.
- **Compensate.** When I train clients and their employees on how to deal with irate customers who experience a problem, I tell them they must take responsibility for the problem, solve it, and then compensate the customer. That means giving customers something of low cost that has high value in their eyes as a means of retaining their business and elevating customer service to a higher level. A restaurant, for example,

can give a patron a free dessert, a hotel can upgrade a guest to a suite, or a cell phone company can give a customer 500 free minutes.

So, what can you give customers inside your organization when you make a mistake? I suggest you give them your time. Offer to stay late, or come in early. Do whatever it takes to solve the problem—do it quickly, and do it on your own time. When you compensate your internal customers, you raise your value in their eyes.

When you treat your internal customers with the same care and concern as you do your external customers, you will earn the respect of others in the organization. **RO**

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