



# Marketing Tip of the Week

## Good communication is great; sometimes communication (at all!) is better

Many experts focus on good communication, reminding us to communicate well, be clear and succinct, “don’t waste people’s time!” However, I believe an even bigger, often overlooked, factor in business is LACK of communication.

*Consider the following situation:*

I recently had a problem with my health insurance. When I called my agent, he had lost my file and couldn’t answer my question, then became confused over whether or not I had the coverage in question. He said he’d check on it, only to leave me hanging for weeks without a response (despite numerous calls and requests for either return calls or e-mails to help eliminate phone tag).

When I met an agent from another agency that also handles my health insurance provider’s policies, I explained the situation and asked him to have someone call me, intending to switch and use them. I later discovered that he did pass my name on to a colleague who handles health insurance (since he did not).

**A week-and-a-half** went by with no return call. Frustrated, I called my own agency again. When my agent wasn’t there, I asked to speak with someone else – and got the President of the company, who is now handling my problem personally.

Then I got a call from the new agent, who explained that I hadn’t received a return call because “she’d been out sick the previous week” (by this time, half of the current week had also gone by). Since I thought she’d either forgotten about me or didn’t have time for me and had gone back to my old agency by then, our opportunity to work together had passed.

A conversation with a respected colleague caused me to ask myself, “Uh-oh, am I being intolerant?”

However, the bigger and more important question is not whether or not I was being intolerant, but whether or not the business person I had contacted had lost the opportunity for new business by allowing a potentially “intolerant” attitude to be fostered, when it could have been nipped in the bud – and actually turned around to be a very tolerant one – with a simple phone call. If she had simply called me (or she’d had someone else call me) to say:

“I’m so sorry – you’ve called at a time when I’m out sick [or I’ve just gotten back from being out sick, or I’m in the middle of a big situation that needs resolving – or almost anything at all!]. May I call you back in a couple of days when I can catch my breath and serve you properly?”

- ◆ Would I have understood? **Of course!**
- ◆ Would I have been more inclined to cut her some slack? **Absolutely (I’ve been there, too!)**
- ◆ Would it have cut off the thoughts/feelings in my head that I was either being ignored, forgotten or was not important to them? **Yes**
- ◆ Would it have given her time to both handle more urgent matters AND gain new business? **Yes**

***In an effort to continually improve our service, we must ask ourselves:***

- ◆ What/how do our customers feel when we don’t answer their calls in a timely manner?
- ◆ Even if *we* know the status of the customer’s situation and know that we’re working on getting it resolved, if we haven’t called to tell them (often for days at a time), do *they* know it?
- ◆ Don’t our customers deserve not to be “left in the dark”?
- ◆ Wouldn’t it help to call, even if we don’t have a full answer yet, or just to say, “I’m waiting for an answer from someone else and haven’t received it yet – but I just wanted you to know that I haven’t forgotten about you”? Would it also help to tell them it may be a few more days before we can get back to them with an answer?
- ◆ Why would we want to give our customers any chance at all to “build up negative scenarios” in their own minds, when timely contact (even if it contains nothing new!) can prevent that from happening?
- ◆ Are backup systems in place to handle customers and potential customers in case we’re out for a period of time... even if it’s just to call people to ask for more time until we return?

***By keeping in touch, we let customers know:***

- ◆ They are important to us
- ◆ We have not forgotten them
- ◆ We are working hard to get their issues resolved
- ◆ We are probably just as frustrated as they are (building commiseration and empathy from our customers; now we’re in this together!)

The nuances of customer service can be tricky to recognize and difficult to remember, especially when we're overloaded. But we must take advantage of every opportunity to differentiate ourselves and allow our customers to think, feel and say (to **everyone** they know), "Wow, when I worked with him/her, I never had to wonder what was going on. I was always kept in the loop, and always felt valued by that person."

We're all overloaded with work and phone calls. And no one is perfect; no one knows that better than I (sigh!). We may not be able to give this level of service every time. But if we strive to learn and improve even a little bit from every situation that arises, trying to do better at least sometimes, that's when we get the biggest bang for our customer service buck, and when we stop allowing overlooked nuances to create negative scenarios in our customers' minds (and subsequent actions).

Try this and watch your customer loyalty – as well as your business - soar!

Have a great week!

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