

How Doing a Perfect Job Can Drive Clients Away

By Justin Locke
August 16, 2011

Advisor Perspectives welcomes guest contributions. The views presented here do not necessarily represent those of Advisor Perspectives.

Nobody is perfect, and having a plan to deal with your imperfections is just as important as improving your performance. That lesson has been deftly illustrated by my local grocer.

I do a lot of shopping at Whole Foods Market. One of the things I love about that store is their return policy. Right up on the wall it says, "If you are not satisfied for any reason, just return it for a full refund."

And they make it easy.

You go right up to an easy-to-find customer service counter, where someone will happily listen to your problem and give you your money back, no questions asked, even if you don't have a receipt. I return about \$100 worth of stuff every year, an insignificant amount given what I spend there annually.

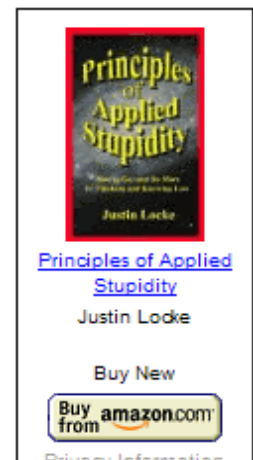
Granted, the grocery is openly admitting to being imperfect and occasionally selling defective merchandise, but it doesn't seem to hurt its business.

When I was a professional bass player, I had no such thing as a "dissatisfied customer policy." I did not see a need for it. After all, I always played the bass extremely well, and I always met or exceeded my fellow bass players' expectations for correct playing. I never created a forum for audience feedback because I told myself it was not necessary. But deep down, the real reason was because I was terrified of it.

I did my job perfectly so no one would criticize me.

The trouble is, when you are doing your job perfectly according to some arbitrary standard, there is no place for criticism. You could be doing something your customers don't like and never realize it.

In the past few years I have had occasion to stop using the services of several professionals in other lines of work, and it was all for the same reason: unlike Whole Foods





Market, they had no customer dissatisfaction policy. There was no forum to calmly and safely express dissatisfaction with their service.

When one is unhappy with vendor, there are three options:

1. Grumble silently and accept the less-than-perfect level of service as “the devil you know.”
2. Work up the courage to call and state the complaint, with no knowledge as to how the vendor will react to it, how unpleasant it might become, how much emotional energy will be involved or if there is a chance of things being fixed
3. Just silently slink away and hire someone else.

For me, option three is by far the most common.

I am sure that whatever service you provide, you are doing it to the best of your ability and exceeding all industry standards. But what if you do something that causes customers to be unhappy? What venue or procedure is available to them to address it? Is there an easy-to-find customer service counter, or are your customers forced to unilaterally decide between the choices above?

No one likes criticism, and unhappy clients are everyone’s worst nightmare, but thinking that doing everything perfectly will avoid customer unhappiness is not the answer. Providing a clear and easy way for customers to criticize you may be hard on your ego, but at least it gives you a chance to talk over issues, retain their business, and — as with my relationship to Whole Foods — make them prefer you above all others.

Justin Locke is an entertaining speaker based in Boston. He spent 18 seasons playing the bass with the Boston Pops, and he is the author of several books, including “Real Men Don’t Rehearse” (a musical memoir) and “Principles of Applied Stupidity,” a look at how to be more productive and effective by going against the conventional wisdom. See more by visiting his website at www.justinlocke.com.

www.advisorperspectives.com

For a free subscription to the Advisor Perspectives newsletter, visit:
<http://www.advisorperspectives.com/subscribers/subscribe.php>