Improving Customer Service: Nine Steps to Service Recovery

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A Companion Learning Tool to this video

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In today’s companion video I told you the story about Nicole Jackson and the Hotel Rex in San Francisco. I hope you enjoyed it. But enjoyment wasn’t my goal as much as was making the point that we all mess up – it’s what we do after a mess up that often matters most. In that spirit, here are seven things you can do to improve things after a mix-up or mistake (or even just a misunderstanding) with a Customer.

1. *Apologize.* It may not have been your mistake. It might not even be a mistake on the part of our organization at all. It doesn’t matter. The Customer is upset, and we can (and need to) apologize to them sincerely to start this process. The Customer wants to be acknowledged and heard – and starting with an apology is the best way to get on the road to Service Recovery.

2. *Don’t explain.* Most explanations are justifications, rationalizations, or feel like them even if they aren’t. Apologize and get on with fixing the problem, not explaining our policy or our position, or why something happened.

3. *Ask what they need now.* Even if you are pretty sure what the Customer needs now (like I did with Nicole, needing a place to sleep), ask them. Find out what their concerns are and what you can do to solve the problem. We can’t fix the past but we can proactively move forward. Hint – by asking we find out what they really want – and often they are looking for less than we might expect (especially when we have led with our apology).

4. *Respond immediately.* Don’t make them wait longer, don’t delay in response. Do what you can to meet their needs immediately, using their response to your question as your guide.

5. *Provide a lagniappe.* When possible, do more than respond; over respond. Remember the Louisiana word lagniappe – which means “a little something extra”. When we give a little something extra in thoughtfulness, details or whatever, it may make all the difference in the world. Often this is the part that creates the positive story for the Customer.

6. *Focus on Customer response and experience.* We are in Service Recovery because the Customer is unhappy. Recovering from the situation isn’t just about dollars or details; it is about emotions. As you are working through the situation focus on them and their needs. Think about how you can make the experience more memorable and valuable. Focus on turning their disappointment, displeasure or anger into a pleasant surprise, a smile or a wow.

7. *Check for agreement and resolution.* Make sure that you have done what you can to create a Customer who will return – and that the episode isn’t a stumbling block for the future. If not, repeat the earlier steps to try to get there.
8. **Thank them for the chance to serve them.** Thank them for the chance to serve them and for the chance to correct the error. Simple, and very important.

9. **Solve the problem or process later.** During the recovery is not the time to fix the problem, blame other departments, or anything else. During service recovery it is all about the Customer. After they leave there may be processes, approaches, training or other things that need to be updated, fixed or changed. Use service recovery moments to identify those opportunities, but address them later.

These steps apply for us personally, they apply to our whole team and could even be the cornerstone of some great Customer Service training (think about implementing these as a process in your organization).

They also apply whether the Customer you are dealing with is the paying Customer or someone internal to your organization who relies on your work output.

In the video, I closed by inviting you to download this tool – and I promised you five tips.

Alas, I’ve given you **nine**.

Another lesson for wowing Customers – whether service recovery is included or not – under-promise and over-deliver.

I hope you are wowed. But more so, I hope you take the steps I’ve outlined below – so that you can wow your Customers.

**Your Now Steps**

1. Apply these steps the next time you identify a service recovery situation. When you do you will likely create a success story.
2. Share them with others, using your success story to engage them in using the steps too.
Additional Resources

- For some additional thoughts and writing on all things related to Customers, check out these articles from my blog, or visit the blog and click on Customer Loyalty, Customer Mindset, Customer Relationships, or Customer Service.

- For more strategies for improving Customer Service, check out our 2 CD set, Making Customers Matter – use promo code 20DAYS and receive a 20% discount!
About Kevin

Kevin Eikenberry is a world renowned leadership expert, a two-time bestselling author, speaker, consultant, trainer, coach, leader, learner, husband and father (not necessarily in that order).

Kevin is the Chief Potential Officer of The Kevin Eikenberry Group, a leadership and learning consulting company that has been helping organizations, teams and individuals reach their potential since 1993. Kevin’s specialties include leadership, teams and teamwork, organizational culture, facilitating change, organizational learning and more.

Kevin also is the creator and content developer of The Remarkable Leadership Learning System, a continual leadership development process based on his bestselling book, Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time, and focused on developing the 13 competencies of remarkable leaders with virtually delivered content to leaders worldwide. He is also the developer of the Remarkable Leadership Workshop, the Coaching Training Camp and the co-developer of the Bud to Boss and Ultimate Communicator Workshops – all offered in both public and in-house versions across North America.