

# Big Mistakes or Big Moments -It's Your Responsibility!

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Anne M. Obarski  
anne@merchandiseconcepts.com

Merchandise Concepts <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com>

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**RESPONSIBILITY:** Customers like to do business with companies who believe it is their responsibility to educate their employees and keep them updated.

Customers expect it even though they may not always tell you. You do your employees and your customers a disservice if you don't provide your staff with the tools they need to efficiently and knowledgeably handle your customer's questions. And once is not enough!

**TRAINING** should be the lifeblood of any successful company and it should encompass everyone from entry level positions to the senior management team. Communication, negotiating, dealing with difficult customers, relationship building, life management, organizational and team building skills should be an on-going part of a business's training program and encompass every employee in the company.

Providing basic job skills training is a given, but adding additional training on intercommunication skills, "soft skills", and life balance techniques, will help to keep your employees working productively as a team both at work and in their private lives as well.

I was amazed to find out from a manager of a large nationwide bookstore chain that their training that used to last two weeks for new hires, has been "trimmed" to three days. I had to ask myself, what did they think was so unnecessary that they cut out? But more importantly, what was IN the original training that they originally felt that every employee should know?

Customers want to deal with people who are knowledgeable and efficient. A customer or clients time is precious to them and beware if you are the one that is "stealing" that time from them by making them wait too long to have their important questions answered. Even worse, is having employees who do not even have the basic skills to perform their daily duties. Performance based training should be the core of a business' training program and it is highly important to evaluate every employee's performance on an ongoing basis.

I am currently consulting for a small family owned grocery store chain. They polled a large number of their current customers to find out what they liked and disliked about the store. The answers made the store owners cringe at times as they read the results.

The BIG MOMENTS in the reports validated their initial reasons for opening up this special little grocery store years ago; to provide the freshest meats, produce and bakery items while providing a wide variety of items not found in other large grocery store chains. The answers, hands down, were that their customers would drive miles to buy their produce and meat items. Customers said, "Your fruit looks like it was hand picked", "Your lunchmeat is so great, I bought it before I went on vacation to our summer cottage", "Please don't change anything, you are doing a great job!".

But the second question offered a little different feedback from the exact same customers. In my mind these are a few "big mistakes".

Comments in this area pinpointed some easy to solve problems for management but ones they may not have even been aware of. "You don't even use the "tickets" at the meat counter correctly. You don't take them in order and sometimes you even take people who don't have a ticket and then when someone makes a comment about that, they complain." What happened to "the customer is always right?"

Other comments these very "loyal" customers made were:

"I am disappointed with some of the employees. When I stand by the counter the staff ignores me and sometimes they make me wait until THEY are ready to help me!"

"I am dissatisfied with the service in the deli, 1/3 of a pound does not mean 1/2 a pound; sliced thin means just that. They just don't seem to listen to what you want. This is why I shop at your store, to get the lunch meat sliced the way I want it!"

"Some of the cashiers make many mistakes are often curt, impolite and waste time."

It is obvious that their customers will continue to come back EVEN when they get poor service or deal with inadequately trained sales associates. They want the product this store carries and they are "willing" to put up with less than perfect service. My question is "Why should they have to?"

The RESPONSIBILITY of this company is now to match the excellence in product assortment and quality with knowledgeable, well-trained sales associates who offer exemplary customer service. Period! Some of these "big mistakes" could be easily changed into "big moments" in the customer's minds. However, it needs to be an ongoing process.

Reward employees and you will see higher performance ratings. Employees will be more loyal to those employers who value their performance. What would it take to develop an "On the Spot" rewards program? This program works well when a manager is given the ability to reward an excellent job performance, "on the spot".

To further make this program valuable, it is important for a manager to "know" what motivates each of their employees. A day off during the week may motivate one employee, where a gift certificate to a favorite restaurant might motivate another and maybe the third employee would be thrilled with a crisp \$20 bill in their hand. It all comes back to knowing your employees, training them, rewarding them and finally developing accountability.

Accountability is the final area in a manager's area of responsibility. I find it amazing when I speak to company executives and ask this simple question; "How often do you sit down and review your people?" I usually get the same answer, "Oh, about once a year when we give a pay increase". Not often enough if you are a people, performance and profit driven company who is focused on continued success. People will perform better at their jobs if they know what they are doing well at and what they need to improve upon on an ongoing basis.

How quickly could those customers who shop in that grocery store change their minds about those employees in the deli department if the manager quickly handled that information that they received on the rating forms? A short meeting with each employee to remind them what a great job they are doing and how being "exact" every time they weigh lunchmeat, for every customer would improve not only their performance but the customer's opinion of the deli department.

Then, on a quarterly basis, sit down with each employee and give them a "High 5" as well as "a little more" meeting. Discuss the positive areas of performance as well as the areas that need "a little more" work. All of the areas discussed should be directly related to their job performance review sheet that they know they will be held accountable for at the end of the year. Professionally and positively handle small problems sooner, and you will help improve performance over the long run.

Train, re-train, reward and hold your employees accountable for the performance they give their customers, everyday. After all, your customer is telling you it's your responsibility!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye" on Performance. She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne works with companies who are people, performance, profit focused and she helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com> or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>. For high resolution photo of Anne, please visit, [www.merchandiseconcepts.com/annephoto.html](http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com/annephoto.html)

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