

Get Focused! Solutions are Worthless, Procedures are Everything!

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I hate to send my husband to the grocery store. I bet there are other women who are just like me. The reason is very simple. Rarely does he come back with what I asked him to get. I think he tunes me out like he must have tuned out his mother.

I can just imagine him thinking, "Oh no, this sounds like a chore to do, so I will only remember what I absolutely need to and the rest is not important."

Case in point. The other day I asked him to pick up a half gallon of milk in the purple container. I thought this was a simple task. When he came home, he had the purple container of milk but it was a quart instead of a half-gallon. I calmly said, "Hmmm, where is the half-gallon?" He replied, "All I heard you say was purple container".

By the way, an apple pie followed him home with the quart of milk!

Maybe that is why I love the new commercial for a cell phone company.

The wife is sitting on the couch and says something like, "I told him to get something old and he came home with a monkey with a cold"!

There is a little monkey laying on the couch with a thermometer in his mouth and blowing his nose with a tissue. The salesman replies, "That is what happens when you have poor reception on your cell phone, you can misunderstand what you hear."

Sounds like a typical husband to me!

Miscommunication doesn't happen just in households, it happens everywhere, all the time. I believe that is why customer service is getting worse and not better. People don't focus on what other people are saying regardless if it is the spoken or written word.

When people don't focus, there is usually miscommunication and valuable time wasted in correcting the problem. A hostile environment can unfold when each person starts arguing that they did exactly what they thought they heard.

Here are 5 ways to improve your customer service and repeat and referral business today, by

sharpening up your focus.

My definition of the word FOCUS is;
FOSTER ONE CLEAR USEFUL SOLUTION.

Before one can truly focus, they have to be in the present. We are a society of multi-taskers! Right now you might be doing three other things as you read this article! Good for you! But you are not giving any one thing your full attention or focus. So before we can focus we have to be in the present, with nothing else vying for our attention.

F - FOSTER COMMUNICATION! Set the stage to be understood clearly by the receiver. Some people like phone conversations where they can speak with a live person. Some would rather have the written word to digest. Others work well with email and some prefer face to face dialogue. Cultivate the style or styles of communication that gets the best results with the fewest errors.

O- ONE BEST ANSWER! Clear, focused, easy to understand communication is the easiest to respond to. I have heard it said to use 8th grade language if you want someone to understand what you have said. Plain, simple and to the point, "Yeah dude"!

C- CRYSTAL CLEAR! If you have ever had your eyes checked there is a test they will do with different lenses. Each time they put one in front of your eyes they will ask, "Which one is best, the first or the second?" Then each time they change the lenses they will ask those questions again. They are trying to achieve the clearest vision for you. Some times it takes asking another person if they have understood what you have said and if they can they repeat it back to you as proof. This is a huge time saver in the long run.

U- USEFUL INFORMATION! Just the facts ma'm, just the facts. That was from an old TV police show where the detective thought the information a person was giving him was interesting but he really wanted to focus on the facts. Avoid wordiness or over-powering grammar when communicating. Limit what needs to be done into "sound bytes". Easy to hear, understand, and complete.

S - SOLUTION! That question reminds me of grade school math. Frankly, you can never get to the solution if you don't understand the procedure. Wasn't it great when the book had the answers in the back? But just knowing the answer did not mean you knew how to do the problem. Too many employees can quote the company policy on something but have no idea why that policy was made. Consequently when you have a customer who questions it, many employees merely respond, "Sorry, it's company policy"! The customer doesn't see this as a solution to their problem but as an invitation to call the manager.

In the new movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding", the father of the bride-to-be uses window cleaner on everything. He swears it works to heal his elbow and he will use it to fix absolutely anything! Wouldn't be great if it was that simple to make our communication skills crystal clear?

One squirt and a little polish and everyone would understand everything we say and write. Maybe there is a lesson here. I am sending my husband for a case of Windex!

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>

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