

One of the first lessons I was taught when I became a manager was that the true quality of any organization is judged by how they resolve their customer's problems. It does not matter if your company carries the best product and the best price. If you cannot take care of your customers when they have a problem your business is going to struggle. Customer issues and escalations are part of any business; it is how you handle them that make the difference between earning your customers loyalty and losing them to the competition.

Customer loyalty is the most valuable commodity any organization can have. These customers are the ones that will come back to you to purchase future goods and services. Satisfied customers are also your most effective advertising as they will refer their friends to you when they are looking to buy. When you resolve a customer's problem in a timely and satisfactory manner you have reassured them that they have made the right decision to purchase a product from you. With so many companies selling similar products today providing customer top notch customer service is a critical step for survival.

Some of the most successful business in the world has been built on their reputation for exceptional customer service. LLBean, Nordstrom's, Netflix are just a few of the companies that are always rated in the top of their category in consumer surveys. No matter what the size of your business providing exceptional customer service is essential to your survival. I contacted Greg Frasca, [President](#) of SkyWeb based in NJ and the [Chairman](#) of the SBCA's Retail Council asking him how he handles customer escalations.

"I actually think of a problem with a client is more of an opportunity to show off the quality of my business. Whatever the situation, an installation issue, equipment functionality or missed deadline, it's all boils down to how you handle the situation with the customer. Honesty is typically the best policy, be straight-forward with the customer. Acknowledge their issue, be apologetic and develop a plan to make it right. If you do this right away the client will appreciate your tact and know that they are dealing with a professional that has the situation under control."

"My first rule is to never try to side-step anything because if you do you can be sure you've lost their repeat business forever. Also do not make excuses such as "I don't make the stuff, I just sell it", that wouldn't fly with you and it certainly will not work for your client. You choose to represent whatever product or service you sell and you need to stand behind it. As soon as you accept payment during a transaction you are married to that deal whether you like it or not and you better stand behind what you sell or you'll find yourself looking for a career change pretty soon. It's all in the perception of the client, and that's what wins you repeat business and referrals."

"It is said that if you treat a customer right and they will tell 3 people about the good experience and refer you. Give a customer a bad experience and they tell 10. Knowing this should be motivation alone to make it right if you want to stay and thrive in business. If you do not handle customer problems in a timely professional manner, you'll be your own worst enemy, and your local competitors will thank you every step of the way."

Now go take those lemons and make some lemonade.