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# Best Practices for Customer Service Recovery

December 28, 2010

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by Eric Britten, Jerry Durant, Tim Giebelhaus, David Kielkucki, Dru Phelps and Jim Watson

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**Executive Summary**

How do you earn back your customer's trust when something goes wrong? As Focus Expert Jerry Durant cautions: "The trust that you have gained over the years is easily wiped away with a single misstep." Fortunately, as Focus Expert Tim Giebelhaus notes, "A customer who had a issue handled well is going to be a more loyal customer than a customer who never had an issue." In this guide, Jerry, Tim and fellow Focus Experts Eric Britten, David Kielkucki, Dru Phelps and Jim Watson share their top 7 best practices for keeping customers satisfied — even when problems arise.

After reading this guide, be sure to check out the entire discussion and join the conversation: http://www.focus.com/questions/customer-service/customer-service-recovery-best-practices-what-are-your-3/.

### Best Practices Checklist

1. Be an attentive listener.
2. Avoid deflection and focus on the customer.
3. Make a sincere commitment to solve the problem — but don't overcommit.
4. Keep the customer in the loop.
5. Remember that honesty truly is the best policy.
6. Ensure that agents are well-trained and empowered to make decisions.
7. Follow up beyond the final resolution.

# Best Practices for Customer Service Recovery

## Best Practices

**1. Be an attentive listener.**
"The customer wants to be heard and know that you understand the impact of the issue. They want to know that they are a valued customer, are being heard and their frustration is understood. Make sure the issue is understood. Understand the big picture of what the customer's deliverables are. Partnering with the customer and finding a better solution will give much greater satisfaction than addressing the smaller issue first reported." (Giebelhaus)

"Give the customer ample time to tell you what happened without interrupting them. It's important the customer be given the opportunity to tell you what they want to tell you. It's cathartic for them, and you need as many of the facts as you can get. Interrupting the customer will probably just upset them. Sometimes, a good ear is all the customer wants." (Britten)

"It is uncanny how many times a company's representatives do all the talking, when they should be listening. Take notes and get all the facts before responding to the issue. When you do respond, recap back in an empathetic manner to the customer your understanding of the issue and their expectation in regard to resolution." (Kielkucki)

**2. Avoid deflection and focus on the customer.**
"If the customer really believes that you have their interests at heart, you'll gain back important ground. If the customer perceives that you are trying to minimize the impact on your own organization with little regard for what they need, you'll lose more ground." (Britten)

"Be contrite. Genuinely apologize and accept blame. This step will diffuse hostility, and create an environment for a constructive resolution." (Watson)

"Jim Watson is spot-on: Be contrite. There is a saying, "Loose lips sinks ships.' Because of the situation, we are apt to try and fill in the blank with harmless babble that will destroy the recovery process." (Durant)

**3. Make a sincere commitment to solve the problem — but don't overcommit.**
"Commit to do something. What that may be depends upon the nature of your business and the severity of the problem. If it's a simple problem, a good sincere apology may be all that's needed or possible. If it's a large issue, you may need to huddle internally and decide the best course of action." (Britten)

"Put yourself in the shoes of the customer and evaluate what it will take, what actions need to be undertaken, in order to regain trust." (Durant)

"Be sure not to commit things that have a significant chance of being missed. Missed expectations are much worse than not setting expectations at all. Confirm with the customer that the plan will meet their needs and adjust it if necessary." (Giebelhaus)

"Some customers will never be placated, so there's no point in giving away the farm and still ending up with a dissatisfied customer. But, once you commit to doing something, do it as quickly as you can." (Britten)

**4. Keep the customer in the loop.**
"Give a schedule for regular updates and ensure that schedule is kept. Work with the customer toward making a schedule that allows for sufficient work to be done between updates, so that the updates will be meaningful. If at all possible, give progress toward the solution at every update. If no results were achieved since the last update, give an update with at least some of the work done toward results." (Giebelhaus)

"If you are going to have to get back to the customer with a solution, tell them when you will get back to them and then do it. Even if you don't have the solution yet, respond by the time you committed to do so." (Britten)

**5. Remember that honesty truly is the best policy.**
"An honest offer of compensation will not only complete the recovery, but also win back the customer as a strong promoter of your product, company and brand. Companies that don't offer compensation can incite negative word-of-mouth – a potentially harmful position, given the power and reach of today's social media." (Watson)

"Be sure the solution is the best one you can offer. Sometimes that's a balancing act between what you can do and what the customer wants. Gain their agreement that the solution is acceptable before moving forward. Be open and honest about the facts and why you believe the solution is the correct one." (Britten)

**6. Ensure that agents are well-trained and empowered to make decisions.**
"Train your staff on how to deal with anger, to elicit feelings and to listen to learn how to best link your offerings to meet the caller's needs. Ensure that the agent has the knowledge and authority to provide recovery in a gracious and grateful manner. The healthcare and insurance industries serve as good examples of how to clarify very complex issues with callers or members, then offer the optimal solutions as a next step." (Phelps)

**7. Follow up beyond the final resolution.**
"Once the complaint has been resolved to the customer's satisfaction, make a follow-up call to a few days later thanking the customer for bringing the product or service issue to the attention of the company and inquire if the issue was handled in a satisfactory manner." (Kielkucki)

**Read the entire discussion, and join the conversation:**
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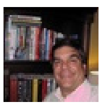

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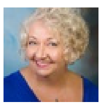

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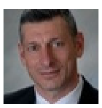

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## About this Report

Focus Best Practices Reports are designed to help professionals understand business and technology best practices in particular topic areas. The best practices included in each report are sourced from Focus Experts who have exhibited expertise in the particular topic. Best Practices Reports are designed to be practical, easy to consume, and actionable.