



Customer Service Honesty versus dishonesty

BY LINDA WOLSTENCROFT

Although we may not realize it, honesty is important in business. In consumer markets, dishonesty frequently occurs in situations where customers have little control and are one out of thousands, if not millions, of other potential consumers.

This can be seen in one case where a courier was assigned to pick up a large-sum bank draft for a real estate purchase. The courier company did not pick up the package from the bank despite repeated phone calls and people were left scrambling at the last minute for the transaction to take place. To top it off, the customer was charged for services not rendered. After noticing the charge, it took an hour to get a resolution and it would take 4-6 weeks for the full refund. However, the courier company also wasn't able to provide written confirmation so the customer would still have to potentially follow up again at a later date. Terribly inconvenient!

A more recent consumer example is Samsung's Galaxy Note 7 exploding battery issue. In this case, the company expressed their sincere apology and efforts were made to rectify the situation. Although it's true that there were significant financial, reputation, and market implications at stake, it was clear that Samsung's CEO made an honest attempt to make good on the potential problems with its users.

With defence markets, there are usually fewer customers so it's assumed that customers are treated with more care; but

the truth is that even in defence contract situations, companies are not immune to dishonesty.

Let's take an example of a defence contract that is obligated to deliver a requirement; perhaps it's a product, a report, a meeting, or a response to an issue. What should one do if something goes wrong?

If the company wishes to preserve a positive customer relationship, they would be honest with their customer.

Unfortunately, some could argue that the defence customer is bound by a long-

term contract or proprietary rights. While some companies think long-term and want to provide a solution in consideration for contract renewal time or for future

business, others don't even bother trying. Companies with this thinking would allow their customer to feel the pain of their disservice knowing that they are secure in their position.

TECHNOLOGY DOES NOT TRUMP GOOD SERVICE

There's also a tendency to use the fact that a company's superior technology can trump good customer service because they know their solution is the only solution. These companies believe the superior technology continues regardless of their service flaws. This attitude of arrogance leads to difficulty in admitting to errors.

Relying on contracts and intellectual property for protection is a form of

dishonesty. A contract was signed with certain obligations and it should be met with honesty.

As a final note, it's not always easy to see what's going on from the top. Sometimes it's only when an issue grows larger that the senior level is notified. Best practice advises to get to the issues early. In one company, the senior level attended all the progress meetings, and reviewed the dynamics and responsiveness to the following points:

- Measure how the meeting was set up: did our company meet the customer's schedule and agenda requirements?
- Review follow-ups from the last meeting: were there still unanswered actions on the part of our company?
- Was our company telling the truth or were we skirting around issues; perhaps blaming a third party such as a supplier or a regulatory authority?
- Did our company do their part to resolve all the issues?

As a company, who do you want to be and what do you want to be known for? Do you want to be the company that lies to its customers while selling or under contract? Or, do you want to be the company that honours the contract and its obligations honestly?

It's your choice.

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