



The Case of Missing Service©

The Situation:

The Bullseye Corporation prides itself on customer service and has received numerous local, state, and national awards for the manner in which it deals with customers. The company is also noted for providing quality merchandise at affordable prices and attracts a high volume of customers to its stores. The president of the company, Robert Gole, just received the CEO of the Year Award from Financial Wizards Magazine. He is very pleased with the performance of the company and especially with the caliber of managers he has. He is particularly impressed with his latest hire, James Moore—a young man and recent MBA graduate with previous executive and retail experience. He placed him in the management position at their newest store.

Robert received a phone call from an irate customer complaining about this store and “the lack of service” she experienced. The customer said that she initially couldn’t find a clerk to assist her with finding her purchases, and when she needed to ask a question about an item the clerk she did find couldn’t answer it. After getting the items she came for, she stood in line for 10 minutes. After her items were rung up she handed the clerk a check for the total but the check would not clear processing. She was asked for identification, which she provided but once again the check was rejected. The clerk informed her that Bullseye could not accept the check. The customer wanted an explanation but was told that the clerk couldn’t provide one. The customer asked to see the manager and, after explaining the situation to him, was given the same response she had received from the clerk. The manager, James, informed her that she needed to call her bank to find out why her check was rejected. The customer shared with the CEO how much time she had taken to find out the reason why, when she had more than adequate funds in her checking account. Her banker even called the Bullseye store but was told they had to call the company contracted by Bullseye to process and approve checks. The customer called this company and was told the problem was a “systems error” with the store’s machine. She asked if they would call Bullseye to let them know that the problem was their machine, but was told they could not do this.

What should the Bullseye President and CEO do?

Potential Options:

- A. Tell the customer he is sorry about the inconvenience caused but the Bullseye Manager and clerk followed company procedures.
- B. Apologize to the customer for the problems this has caused and offer her a gift certificate to shop at Bullseye.
- C. Tell the customer he understands her frustration and will have the manager call her within 24 hours with an answer.
- D. Let the customer know that he is very concerned about her account and will speak to the manager immediately and ask him to find out the reason why her check was rejected; and if he needs her authorization to give the Bullseye check processing vendor information he will contact her to arrange this. The President and CEO will also arrange to meet with the Manager to discuss this customer’s complaint and diagnose how it was handled so that it doesn’t ever happen again.

Ki ThoughtBridge Counsel:

Combinations of “B and D” are the best options. They show the President’s genuine concern about the customer’s feelings of frustration and recognize the violation of one of the core values of the company that of customer service. These responses are also opportunities to use this problem to mentor and coach the high potential new manager about the company’s core values and what these look like in actual practice. The new manager should not be chastised for his inadequate response but informed about the manager’s responsibility to be in alignment with the company’s values.

In addition, these two options involve follow up so the customer is not left dangling or feeling dismissed. When a customer’s experience is the opposite of how a company markets itself, there is cognitive dissonance and a decline of trust.

Last, the gift certificate is a token of appreciation and an invitation to remain as a loyal customer. Customers who feel their complaints are heard and treated fairly are most likely to return and to say good things about how the company treated them.

What advice would you give the President and CEO? The Manager?

About the Author

[Katherine Tyler Scott](#) is the managing partner of Ki ThoughtBridge. Katherine is the founder and former President of Trustee Leadership Development, Inc., a resource center for governance leaders and not-for-profit organizations, located in Indianapolis, Indiana. She has more than 30 years of experience in leadership education and development, consultation, coaching and facilitation. Katherine is a nationally recognized speaker and has written extensively on the topics of leadership, trusteeship, organizational development, and change work.

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