

NUTS: Southwest Airlines Blog

“Being Proactive—The Next Generation of Customer Service”

Part Three—Proactive Communication

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(In the first installment, I outlined the need for Proactive Customer Service. In the second, we drilled down a bit deeper and looked at some rules of thumb. Here are the key elements of effective proactive communication.)

24/7/365 Commitment

Proactive communication isn't a nine to five, Monday through Friday, job.

Being a proactive communicator requires being ready to act no matter where you are or what you are doing—this is the most important aspect about providing truly proactive Customer Service and proactive communication.

The Apology

Don't be afraid to say I'm sorry.

People often misunderstand the intent of an apology. It is not an admission of fault. It's an acknowledgment of a bad experience—no matter what happened. It doesn't mean the Customer is always right—there's no need to support, tolerate, or reward abusive behavior.

When things don't go according to plan, an apology provides the opportunity to offer the Customer an assurance that you care about their feelings. An apology lets you reach out to the Customers who are affected by acknowledging the disruption/inconvenience, offering your assistance, providing an explanation, and letting them know you're working to prevent a repeat performance (if applicable).

If you don't know the answer to a question, it's okay to admit that—just don't speculate and be sure you let the Customer know that you will try to provide them with an answer within a reasonable timeframe.

Heartfelt, Homespun Correspondence

Form letters don't cut it.

Customers can smell insincerity from a mile away. Impersonal form letters and/or cookie-cutter responses water down your product. If that's the impression you want to convey, then so be it. However, half-hearted efforts, at best, increase frustration—or worse, cost you a Customer.

Passion to Serve

You have to have the desire to try to settle the Customer's concern using all of the suggestions that I offered up previously. You have to be flexible in order to find and provide a reasonable solution. You have to have confidence in being humble—all of the time. And, you have to have a good sense of humor.

(In my next posting, I'll show you how my Team "walks the talk" with our proactive efforts.)