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What Makes Your Customers Walk Away and Not Return?



One of the most crucial elements of any business — customer service — can literally make or break your bottom line.

If your business is not as profitable as you'd like, take a look at how your customers are being treated.

Three times in the past week I saw legitimate, interested customers walk away from their purchases.

Untrained Associates

One of the most common customer service mistakes made by businesses is **putting their associates to work prematurely**. Often the source of negative customer service stories comes from a lack of employee training and/or experience. One negative experience by an [under trained or improperly trained employee](#) can cost your company customers and revenues.

I watched a frustrated family walk away from the shop where they were trying to get a pair of glasses for their son. The employee didn't know how to place the order on the computer. While he continued to apologize, the customers finally said they had been there for over an hour and needed to leave. They left without ordering the glasses. They left the employee's business card on the counter. They are not returning.

No matter how knowledgeable someone may be in any given industry, there is always a learning curve when someone starts a new job. In this case, the employee needed to be better acquainted with the software. Even the most customer-focused service

representatives can fail when not properly trained on the equipment. While on-the-job training is necessary, new people should be closely supervised and supported until they are prepared to handle the vast majority of customer needs on their own.

Unhelpful Associates

Another common mistake happens when **an associate thinks they know more than they do**. Despite the fact that every company has policies, there are times when breaking protocol is appropriate.

An older lady was buying a basket of assorted items at a health food store. The store apparently had a policy that discourages associates from providing shopping bags to customers, possibly for environmental or costs-cutting reasons. In this case, the woman's total was over \$200 of vitamins and other groceries. When the lady asked for a bag, the clerk became argumentative. The clerk said they did not provide bags anymore, despite the visible pile of bags under the counter. Watching the transaction, it was clear that the employee was more concerned with defending the policy than helping the customer or providing any customer service. The customer, in exasperation, finally canceled the transaction and walked out. For the cost of a 5 cent bag. Another person waiting in line got so disgusted watching the rudeness of the clerk that he walked out, too.

[Combative employees](#) value being right above all else, and they are more likely to argue than serve the customers. This was a simple request. The cashier's unhelpful attitude gave that customer, as well as everyone else there, a poor impression of the store, and certainly cost them revenue.

Unavailable Associates

Have you ever wandered around a store looking for help? Another common customer service issue is the **lack of coverage**. There should be employees available to serve your customers when they need help.

In a local box store, a man shopping with his young daughter needed a table pulled off a high shelf, requiring a mechanical ladder. He struggled to find someone who could help him. When he finally got someone's attention, they didn't know who was supposed to operate the mechanical ladder. (It was sort of ironic that this was in a hardware store and three staff members didn't know how to work a ladder.)

The entire process took over 25 minutes. By the end of the ordeal, the 3-year-old toddler was crying, the man was on his cell phone with his wife arguing about whether or not they really needed this table for the other child's school event, and the manager was involved.

Part of an employee's job is to make it easy for people who want to buy the products. That didn't happen. [The lack of available associates](#) can also make your customers storm out.

Unfriendly Associates

Many employers downplay the importance of [having a friendly staff](#). We know that studies show it costs up to seven times more in marketing costs to acquire a new customer than it does to retain an existing one. It makes good business sense to ensure each customer has an outstanding experience each and every time they interact with your company. Although being friendly can be learned, **hiring people who are innately personable** and good with customer service skills is half the battle.

"The customer is always right" is not true, but having a well-trained, accessible, and friendly team who values your customers goes a long way toward profitability.

I'd love to hear what you think about this article. Please post your comment [here](#).

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