

Can Good Customer Service Ever be *Bad*?

AS WE GET OLDER, WE sometimes find ourselves bemoaning the level of customer service being provided by the younger generations that follow. Trying hard not to sound too much like our parents and grandparents, we wonder aloud about the rudeness of salespeople who would obviously much rather be somewhere—anywhere—else but there, and for whom a simple “thank you” or even a genuine smile seems far too much to ask.

With the threat of poor customer service ever-looming, when we do get great (or even good) service, we appreciate it. Sometimes, the service is so good that we want to tell all of our friends and encourage them to shop in the same store. But is it too good to be true? I recently encountered such a situation that made me wonder.

In the process of making some changes to my firm’s cellular phone account, I needed to accomplish two things. I went into a cellular phone store near my home, hoping to make the necessary changes to our account and get new phones. Although it was early evening, the store was busy and shortly after we got there, one of the two sales associates left, leaving our sales associate on her own.

As more people came and went in and out of the store, the associate deftly handled inquiries from other customers, while still working with us. Although she could not make the changes to the account that we

AMY M. COHEN
SCVBA President



amy@cohenlawplc.com

requested, she did tell us that we would be able to get the new phones that we wanted (despite our having been told at another store that we would have to wait until April 1).

Because the store was busy and our children were hungry, we opted to leave our account in her seemingly capable hands and stepped out across the street for dinner. I came back to the store about 45 minutes later to find it still busy, and the associate still manning it on her own. We completed the final paperwork and left the store with two new phones, a new home phone set-up and a promise that the account changes we wanted could easily be done the next day by phone, using the 1-800 number she provided.

If you are thinking this was too easy, you are correct. My husband (and law partner) was skeptical and said as we were driving home, that it could not have been that easy and that something had to go wrong. He was right.

The next morning, we first attempted to call the 1-800 number our sales associate had provided, only to find that it was incorrect. After calling the store to get the correct number, we called our cellular phone company and attempted to make the account changes we needed. The first step relating to our old account was easy. When we attempted step two relating to our new account and new phones, we encountered (of course) problems.

The corporate representative that I spoke with told me that the store

SFVBA
MCLE

2013
Seminars
on
Audio

**COULDN'T ATTEND AN
IMPORTANT SFVBA
SEMINAR?**

Most SFVBA seminars
available on
audio CD or MP3.

Stay current
and earn MCLE
self-study credit.*

**Also available are all the mandatory
subfields: legal ethics, elimination
of bias, and the prevention of
substance abuse.*

Who is Versa-Tape?
Versa-Tape has been
recording and marketing
audio copies of bar
association educational
seminars to California
attorneys since 1983.

www.versatape.com
(800) 468-2737





**112 WAYS TO SUCCEED
IN ANY NEGOTIATION
OR MEDIATION**

SECRETS FROM A PROFESSIONAL MEDIATOR

STEVEN G. MEHTA

Steven G. Mehta is one of California's premier, award-winning attorney mediators, specializing in intensely-difficult and emotionally-charged cases.

Steve's book, **112 Ways to Succeed in Any Negotiation or Mediation**, will turbo-charge your negotiation skills regardless of your experience.

To schedule your mediation or order a copy of Steve's new book, call **661.284.1818** or check with your local bookseller, preferred online retailer, or online at:
www.112ways.com or www.stevemehta.com

Locations in Los Angeles & Valencia
Mediations throughout California

sales associate had set things up incorrectly and instead of having three lines on our account, we currently had five and the new phones would not be able to be moved to our old numbers. I was told that I would have to go back to the store and have them terminate and unwind everything. Once that was done, corporate could set things up the way we needed. I was also told that we were not supposed to get new phones that early, and that the store we had gone to was not a company store, but rather an authorized retailer, something that is impossible to know just by looking at the store.

When I returned to the store, the associate we had worked with was not in. I explained the situation to the other associate, who obviously did not want to unwind her co-worker's sale. She called her co-worker and I was told that it was actually the corporate office who did not understand what was happening, and that it could be easily resolved. (I still find the finger-pointing humorous.)

I spent much of the rest of the afternoon bouncing back and forth between my office and the store, hoping that the two associates could resolve the issues, fix our account, and still get us the phones. At the end of the day, the second associate did have to terminate the two new lines and return the new phones, unwinding a good portion of what had been done the night before. I found myself apologizing to her, not wanting to cause problems because I appreciated the hard work of the associate from the night before. However, at the same time I was frustrated that it was not as easy as I was told it would be, and that I had to spend time trying to fix things.

If you are getting good customer service, but it is not accomplishing what you need to accomplish, or you end up with the wrong equipment or products, does it render the customer service bad? If you consider this situation from a different angle—

perhaps one of the stereotypical used car salesman—does that make the service bad?

It could be that I was so relieved to be speaking with someone who was acknowledging my needs, who was smiling, and who was able to handle a crowd and still answer my questions, that I lost sight of what I really needed, and let the "good" service cloud my judgment. (Again, looking at it from a used car standpoint, did I get snowed? Did I leave with things that I did not need because she was such a good salesman?) We did say no to several of the upgrades and up-sells that she was offering, but at the same time, did we say yes too much?

It is easy to dismiss bad customer service and vow never to return to a particular store because of it. But what if you still are not sure if the service you got was good or bad? How will you ever know?

We will know when we get our first bill whether or not things were handled appropriately and if all issues were fixed. My partner's money is on things not being correct. If that ends up being the case, I will be the one spending more time on the phone with the company and possibly more time in the store, dealing with the associate.

It could be at that point, that the "good" service I may have initially received is outweighed by the time spent in correcting mistakes, rendering it "bad" service. Or it could be that our first bill will be correct, allowing me to relax and enjoy the good customer service I think I got and feel more comfortable about possibly returning to the store. In the meantime, at least I have my new phone to play with. 📞

The Santa Clarita Valley Bar Association holds monthly CLE seminars and mixers for its members. Visit www.scvbar.org for information on upcoming programs and events.