

## **CUSTOMER-FOCUS: Those Annoying Customers**

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### ***Picture this...***

You're strolling along on a beautiful summer evening. You've just finished a relaxing dinner, and you happen upon an ice cream shoppe. This isn't just any ice cream store. It's top of the line (hence the extra "pe" on "shop"). They have more flavors and fancy names than you could imagine. The store is bright and cheery in its design and there's a sweet smell in the air. It makes your mouth water. The large array of cones is lined before you at the counter, from plain to sugar and a variety of flavored waffle cones! You are ready to indulge.

Now the bubble bursts. The first person you confront behind the counter has made it clear you are not her priority. She makes no effort to finish a phone conversation, one that is quite obviously personal. As she hangs up and stands before you, you feel compelled to ask, "Are you ready to take my order?" As you begin, a young man crashes through the swinging door at the back of the shoppe -- you are thinking FIRE! - then he rushes to the front door, props it open, and begins to hurl the sidewalk cafe furniture indoors in preparation for closing. You look at your watch and notice it's 7:43. "What an odd time to close," you think.

You get your waffle cone anyway and sit inside the shoppe to enjoy it. Out comes a mop and bucket of ammonia water, as employee #3 begins to wash the floors while you try to enjoy your dessert. Ahh, the taste of Chocolate *Ammonia* Mint in a hazelnut cone! But being a "good customer," you merely continue eating your ice cream while remembering to raise your feet as employee #3 mops beneath your table. OK, you say to yourself, you've had enough and you walk out. At least you can enjoy the ice cream in the pleasant night air. Just as you're crossing the store's threshold, you hear the employee behind the counter shout to employees 2 and 3, "I'm covering the ice cream now. Tell anyone that walks in that we aren't serving anymore." You check your watch. It's 7:54pm. You shake your head and leave.

### ***If only it weren't true....***

This is a small example of the *Clueless* nature by which so many businesses operate. Did any of these thoughts come to mind as you read the tale of the ice cream shoppe?

- I wonder what the owner would think about this situation?
- What a shame that I have no desire to go back there....although the ice cream was delicious.
- You just can't find good help these days.
- Will these kids ever understand the meaning of WORK ETHIC?
- I wonder how long they will be in business?
- Who's in charge here anyway? Is there no manager?

- I wish I could get that ammonia taste out of my mouth.

We could construct quite a list reacting to such outrageous treatment. What is important here, however, is that we learn from this situation and the many like it which we encounter everyday.

The type of service experienced at our ice cream shoppe raises a lot of questions. Let's go through a *constructive* list of the issues and questions raised in this situation:

- 1) What type of hiring practices does the business utilize?
- 2) What type of training is given to employees before they begin work?
- 3) Have customer service expectations been made clear, and are they reinforced periodically?
- 4) Was a supervisor on the premises, and is a supervisor necessary?
- 5) Should the owner be present to monitor these activities?
- 6) What reward or recognition systems may have been in place to foster/encourage high levels of service?
- 7) Is there any vehicle for customers to easily provide feedback on the service they received?
- 8) What would have been the reaction if something was said to these employees?
- 9) What procedures are in place to try and win back a disgruntled customer?
- 10) Have we quantified the extent of damage which poor service can do to future business and to profitability?

There can always be more questions or ideas to add, but this is the type of analysis that should take place. It is actually easier to do a constructive analysis with a situation we encounter rather than with situations where our customers encounter us. But don't let that deter you. This analysis needs to be done for every level of direct customer contact. After all, customers aren't annoying, they are our reason for being.