

CONNECTIONS

Linking People and Ideas

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Protect Your Company's Credibility at all Costs.

Paul Dorrian

Customers want to deal with credible people whom they feel are giving them a fair deal, and who are honest and sincere with them. There are two ways to protect your company's credibility. Firstly your staff will need to build trust with their customers at all levels. This comes by being sincere, by keeping promises, by giving the customer the complete facts, never lying and by owning the responsibility for the customer's problem, query or complaint. Encourage your staff never to pass the buck. In the event that the customer has to be referred to a third party, train and encourage your staff to always follow up on the customer's behalf.

The second way of protecting your company's credibility is to encourage your staff to maintain a customer service image at all times via their behaviour. They need to be consciously aware of the image they convey, and the implications of their behaviour. Remember, what is said to customers and how they perceive the behaviour of company staff will play an important role in the manner in which they view the company. Put simply, the way in which customers see you and your staff are projecting yourselves will affect the manner in which they will behave towards you.

Several years ago I accompanied a client of mine to pick up his car from a well-known dealership in Johannesburg, after it had been serviced, and after he had been advised that it was ready to be collected. On arrival at the service department we found two assistants behind the reception desk eating sandwiches, drinking cool drink from a can and moving in time to the music that was blaring from a radio. After having been ignored for several minutes, my client asked to be served. On enquiring about his car, neither of the two assistants claimed to know anything about it, nor were they able to raise anybody from the workshop on the internal telephone. When he asked to see the service manager my client was informed that he was unavailable, as was the assistant manager. My client then asked to be directed to the workshop and went off to find his car. I was left at reception. No one asked me to take a seat, offered me a refreshment or bothered with me for the forty five minutes it took for my client to do battle with the workshop personnel. During the time I sat at reception, I witnessed the most appalling behaviour from some of the service personnel. I saw service people drinking cool drink out of a bottle in full view of customers, customers being ignored at the reception desk and a couple smooching behind an office partition, but just in view of customers. We left the dealership minus my client's car. Fortunately he had asked his company driver to wait after we had been dropped off, so we had a lift back to his office.

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On arriving at his office, my client telephoned the managing director of the dealership to explain the situation, only to be abruptly told that he must be mistaken, because all the staff in all branches had been fully trained in customer service. (I had not carried out any training with this company!!). Needless to say my client's company as a whole no longer supports this brand of vehicle. A massive amount of business was lost for this particular dealership, and for the manufacturer.

This example illustrates a very simple but poignant principle. Protect your own credibility and that of your company at all times, or pay the price of non-compliance. My client lost all confidence in this dealership and felt that he was being ill-treated and even lied to. All credibility the dealership had, disappeared within the space of an hour. From my perspective, and from where I was sitting (quite literally), all the expensive décor of the reception area, from its marble flooring to the expensive furniture, and the glitz of the showroom, meant absolutely nothing. The behaviour of the service staff at that moment in time, nullified all the sales and marketing efforts of both the dealership and the manufacturer. Employee behaviour both business and non-business, influences the perception people have of any organisation.

All the advertising money spent building up the image of the brand and supporting the sales effort of both manufacturer and dealership was wasted. The efforts of the advertising agency and its staff to support the brand and the dealership became ineffectual. The brand, its image and its equity suffered in the eyes of a customer who was in a position to put a lot of business the way of that dealership. And all because the management of this particular company had not adequately prepared its staff to credibly manage each customer situation. The end result was that a competing brand and its dealership benefited to the tune of millions of Rands in new business over the next few years.

Paul Dorrian is the principal consultant of The Dorrian Consulting Group. His latest book, Dancing With The Customer. 101 lessons Towards Service Supremacy will be released in South Africa later this year.

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