

INTELLIGENCE

Unbelievable Service

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

Picture this: It's about 10 p.m. and I'm checking into a hotel in Florida. The place is inexpensive, but not on the lowest-rate tier. I'm there with other family members for my grandmother's wedding.

As my cousin and I are settling into the room, we notice stains on the table, old coffee in the coffeepot, and towels

that have been used, recently.

We contact the office, where only the night clerk is on duty. Thinking that if other items haven't been cleaned, we probably don't have clean sheets, so we ask to switch rooms. We do, and the second room looks clean at first.

But, as I pull down the covers to get into bed, I see a large

smear of makeup on the pillow. Incredulous, I call the night clerk. He tells me there are no more rooms available and fresh linens are locked up until morning. I tell him I will be by first thing in the morning to talk to the manager.

Ironically, the beds each have a placard that guarantees satisfaction or your money

In the worst sense of the word.

back. I spend the night sleeping on top of the comforter, shivering, and disgusted.

The next morning my cousin and I go to the manager, taking the pillow with makeup as evidence. He not only doesn't apologize profusely, but he accuses us of lying and dirtying the pillow and sheets ourselves in order to get a free room. He then tells us that if he refunds our money, we have to check out so he can ensure that this doesn't happen again the next night. Absolutely unbelievable. I am livid. We leave.

I wish I could say that this story was made up to prove a point. But it's 100 percent true. Even though I have discussed bad customer service several times in this column, I have never before experienced service that horrendous.

What can companies do to avoid those types of customer service nightmares? An excellent Cheat Sheet article from *Business 2.0*, "How to Win Customer Loyalty," boils the

issue down to its essentials. There are two ways to head off the majority of customer complaints, the article says: 1) Improve your system, and 2) improve individual staff's performance.

The article lists these suggestions to help resolve systemic issues:

- Promise less so you can shine with what you do provide, like Southwest Airlines.
- Create a process to regularly hear your customers.
- Give employees an allotment of money to spend fixing customer problems. Ritz-Carlton provides US\$2000 per worker.
- Follow up later to ensure problems were resolved.

To fix people problems:

- First make sure you're hiring the right people. Headsets.com puts applicants through a day of service tryouts.
- Set an example. Amazon.com CEO Jeff Bezos occasionally answers customer service calls.

- Invest in training. FedEx's call center gives new employees five weeks' worth, with all employees getting additional training every four months.
- Admit your mistakes.

Many companies won't—like that Florida hotel. Recover gracefully by apologizing, empathizing, fixing the mistake quickly, and following up to ensure it's resolved.

I had vowed to the manager of that hotel that I would be contacting the corporate office, sending along pictures I took. I'm sorry to say that life interfered and then it seemed too late. But I am definitely going to forward this column along with a personal note: "By the way, this was your company."

A friend who read my customer service articles recently told me that she has twice complimented managers on their staff's service—inspired by this column.

"Just One Thing," and "Strategic Service" (October and November 2003 T+D) and "Service Training" and "Service Training, Pt. II" (May and August 2002 T+D).



Did You Know?

Most companies
lose a third
of their customers
per year;
getting new
customers **costs**
five times
more than keeping
current ones.

◀ Source/*Business 2.0*



””” E-Learning and Accessibility

As e-learning proliferates, more resources, including legislation, are becoming available to ensure its accessibility by people with disabilities. Here's a sampling.

- The Accessibility in Distance Education Website was created by University of Maryland's University College, which specializes in adult

distance learning. The site offers simple, straightforward information, resources, and best practices.

➤ www.umuc.edu/ade

- A paper presented at the 2003 Distance Education Conference, "Providing Access to Students with Disabilities in Online Distance Education: Legal, Technical, and Practical Considerations," is an excellent in-depth resource.

➤ http://people.uis.edu/rschr1/onlinelearning/archive/2004_03_28_archive.html

- In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act will enforce training accessibility not just in government but also in commercial education (except in cases that would put unreasonable financial hardship on the provider).

➤ www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/12/08/1070732143470.html

Smart Link

People With Disabilities Foundation

➤ www.pwdf.org

Offers employers information, products, and training on how to best accommodate people with disabilities, including psychiatric ones.

Global 360

Current events are not impairing

employee motivation to accept **overseas assignments**, found a recent study by

Cendant Mobility, a provider of global mobility management and workforce development solutions.

The survey examined more than 500 workers from 17 countries. Only 13 percent of respondents said they would refuse an assignment because of **world events**, almost the same number who said they would refuse based on their experience (12 percent).

However, respondents from international companies based in the Americas were slightly more likely (16 percent) to refuse assignments because of world events than workers in other parts of the world.

Survey Says

The difference in work values between men and women can cause stress and health problems in the workplace, says a new study by Luminari, a U.S.-based health education company.

The study, "Creating Healthy Corporate Cultures for Both Genders," found that the work values most important to male respondents were pay and benefits, achievement and success, and status and authority. Although those values are also important to women, female respondents ranked friendships and other relationships, recognition and respect, and communication and collaboration as higher priorities.

A conflict between values in the workplace can cause stress, which can lead to depression, cardiovascular problems, and a higher susceptibility to infectious diseases, according to the study. For example, the risk of cardiovascular disease almost doubles when a worker feels job stress.

As employers attempt to reduce health-care costs, says Elizabeth Browning, Luminari's CEO, they must address workplace culture. Managers need to be sensitive to gender differences in values. According to P. Michael Peterson, a professor of health promotion who conducted the Luminari study, "Knowing and managing the difference helps to not only effectively motivate employees and generate consistent, quality results, but also to foster loyalty and overall physical and emotional health."

The healthier the workers, the healthier the company, Browning says. Employers should conduct an assessment of the company's culture and determine how men and women respond to it. "If we value our people, the best metric of success should be the health of the employee."

➤ [More/ www.luminari.com/landmark_study/LandmarkStudyLeadRelease.doc](http://www.luminari.com/landmark_study/LandmarkStudyLeadRelease.doc)

Send press releases or short articles on news and best practices to **Intelligence**, T+D, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043. Email intelligence@astd.org.