



Stanford eCorner

Dealing With Complaints

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2045/Dealing-With-Complaints>

When receiving complaints, Conley recommends that managers drop everything and immediately contact the offended party. Even if you cannot solve the problem, immediate response can halt deepening resentment and the viral effects of negative word-of-mouth PR. Though Conley believes that employees are actually more important than customers, it is important for employees to understand the customer's point of view and not become defensive when a customer complains.



Transcript

Well, the rule that I used most of these managers in the company knows they have to live by just because it is sort of my rule. And that is if I get a phone call or an e-mail or a letter, whatever form of communication from somebody, from someone, whether it is an employer or customer who is upset about something, I drop. Unless, I am doing something I cannot drop. I drop everything. And within 10 to 15 minutes after I have gotten it, I respond in some fashion. Because when I got the e-mail today from the guy who had losses or gotten his wedding room stolen, one or the other, I immediately responded. He has not responded back yet, but what is the best thing, people who are upset about something, feel like they had been disrespected. That is, I mean sometimes there are lots of other elements to it; logic, fairness, etc. But on one sort of deeper level, they feel disrespected. So, the question is, how you win back the sense of respect.

And the first thing I think what you do, is you are exceptionally responsive in terms of how quickly you respond. I mean, with each passing day, when someone is upset about something, they only build a deeper and deeper resentment, and they have told 20 other people about how terrible your business is. So, even if you cannot give a response it says, here is the solution. The response is saying, I hear what you are saying. I am really sorry. Let me do a little bit of research on this, and I will get back to you within the next 24 hours. That is worth something. So, that is the first step. It is just to actually exceptionally responsive. Secondly, is to do a research, like difficult conversations or about ultimately if it is an issues between, he said, she said, is to figure out a way to get both parties in the same room at the same time if you can or if you cannot hear both sides of the story, separately, and then trying to come up with a resolution that would actually seems fair.

Now, I am a big believer on what Herb Kalaher said at Southeast Airlines which is the, customer comes second. It is the employee who comes first and I believe that strongly because ultimately that is the longer term relationship but there will be times where I need to work with the employee just to have them help understand where the customers are coming from here. And a lot of times what happens, the customer is very upset about something, they immediately shout, so the employee gets immediately defensive. When you are in the defensive place, it is very hard to be understanding and being empathetic for the person who is actually making you feel that way. So, some of it is just actually trying to get a little bit role playing going. But the bottom line is the most important piece of it ultimately, is to come to, is just to be direct and respectful as possible. To come to a resolution, that makes people feel like that they have been heard and ultimately makes them feel like they have not been disrespected in the process.