

THE POWER OF SURPRISE

“First time I've ever lost a game that way. First time I've ever seen a game lost that way.” -NICK SABAN

Saban is referring to his surprise loss to Auburn in the 2013 Iron Bowl. With one second left, Alabama attempted a 50+ yard field goal. The ball soared through the air, on target, but it didn't have the distance. The ball fell eight yards short into the arms of Chris Davis, an Auburn receiver. Davis ran it back for a touchdown to win the game. The Auburn nation was in a euphoric state while Alabama was devastated. Although the game was just another win and loss, there was one element that made this game larger-than-life, surprise. Surprise can have the same effect in customer service.

Surprise has the ability to make every service experience that much better, or make everything worse. In fact, a recent Harvard Business Review article mentions that surprise can amplify whatever emotion you are experiencing. The article also argues that surprise is one of our most powerful marketing tools. Surprise can make or break your customer experience.

However, surprise is becoming more and more difficult. Companies benchmark themselves against their competitors. Companies are too quick to say “me too” instead of “Surprise! We're different.” Companies are changing to become the same, rather than changing to surprise their customers.

Given, the ubiquitous nature of products and services, it shouldn't surprise you that only 7% of customers are delighted. In a recent customer service survey sponsored by American Express, customer experiences are average or below average 93% of the time.

To surprise customers, we must look for opportunities. Customers will give us hints, but we need to recognize these hints as opportunities. If the customer shows the slightest hint of dissatisfaction, it is an opportunity. The slightest hint of satisfaction is also an opportunity to heighten the experience.

To surprise customers, we must also find a way to say yes. When a customer needs our help, we say yes. When a customer needs more information, we say yes. When a customer asks “can you do this,” we say yes. There are several ways we can say yes. For example, if you don't know the answer, find out who does. If the customer problem is unique, research a solution. If they need to vent, then listen. I recently met a business owner who understands the importance of saying “yes” to customers. Surprisingly, the name of his company is Yes Cleaners.

The next time you are presented with an opportunity to surprise a customer, say yes. They will remember the experience. Think of the last time you received surprise service.

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