

3 Ways to Tick Off a Customer

As an evolving professional speaker, I am always on the lookout for new material. It keeps things fresh. In Value-Added Selling, this is called tinkering. Inevitably, someone in the marketplace accommodates my professional growth and my tinkering.

Several times a week, I frequent a local bread/coffee shop. I recognize the employees and they recognize me. Their holiday promotion was a small gift card if your purchases reached a target dollar amount. I bought several gift cards for family members, hitting the magic number, and scoring a freebie for myself. The manager at that location handled the transaction.

This past week, my wife and I stopped by for coffee and tendered our gift card. The employee working the register said the card was never activated. Therefore, she could not apply it to our purchase. I explained how I acquired it. She knew all about the promotion but still would not honor it. “The register will not recognize it,” she said. She theorized that the manager failed to “charge” the card when he gave it to me. She apologized but rejected the card. We are not talking a lot of money here—two cups of coffee. For the price of two cups of coffee, an employee decided to do nothing to serve a frequent and loyal customer. There are three lessons to draw from this experience.

First, apply the DIRT principle—do it right today. The manager failed to complete the transaction by not activating the card. It was chaotic that day, and he dropped the ball. The logic of the DIRT principle is sound: If there is not enough time to do it right the first time, how will there be enough time to do it over again? Slow down and do the job right. The quality goes in before the name goes on something.

Second, take ownership and make a decision. Sometimes, it is better to ask forgiveness than permission. This employee recognized me from many previous visits but failed to make it right. Her fault? Maybe. I call this the “slack factor.” Every employee *should* be empowered to make an adjustment decision to satisfy a customer. In this case, she would have been satisfying a loyal customer. Maybe her management told her to never make a decision. Maybe they have not empowered their employees to use their judgment. Or, it could be she just doesn’t care. In either case, she could have cut me some slack, taken ownership for customer satisfaction, and risked a decision. Though, she did strike me as a “rules person.” We all know one. “No coffee for you, today! Next.”

Third, she could have taken the initiative to check with the manager on duty. Go the next step. She could have said, “Let me check with our manager to see what I can do.” Did she offer that? Nope. I doubt it occurred to her. So, we paid for the coffees, sat, and chatted. For the price of two coffees, I acquired this story. By the time I finish wordsmithing it, I will have a good story to share with others on how not to treat a customer. On balance, I think I got the better end in this deal.

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