

The Colorado Springs BUSINESS JOURNAL

www.csbj.com

WE MEAN BUSINESS

November 6, 2009

DARE TO BE DULL

Fighting back against frightening customer service

Every big company in America claims customer service is their No. 1 priority. Yet customer service is on the decline.

CSBJ editor Mike Boyd wrote about his incredibly bad experience with J.P. Morgan Chase, but I've had three of my own customer service nightmares.

The blind leading the blinds

I purchased some custom-made Levalor blinds from my local Home Depot store. The blinds were ready as promised and I received a call from SAIA Motor Freight giving me a four-hour window to wait for delivery.

Although I should have known better, I waited all four hours before calling, only to learn from the indifferent service representative that the blinds were still several hundred miles away in Utah. In search of someone who, say, actually cared about my experience, I escalated to a supervisor in Denver. After sternly demanding to know why they had me wait for four hours rather than notifying me, the supervisor's response was, "you are rude."

So, I fired off an e-mail to "customer service." I was told the blinds would be delivered the following Monday, and given another four hour window. Having learned my lesson, I called after the first hour and the manager actually claimed he was just going to call me to let me know the blinds appeared to be damaged. They were sent to Home Depot to see if they could be salvaged and the decision was a resounding "no."

Home Depot observed that it looked like a pallet had been dropped on them. The blinds would have to be remanufactured.

I was able to get the telephone number of the SAIA regional manager. He denied any intentional damage, what a shocker, but said he'd investigate and get back with me.

When he did get back with me, it was an e-mail that stated: "I am sorry that your experience with SAIA Motor Freight has not been a perfect one." If my experience was merely



Allan
R O T H

"not perfect," I'd have hated to see an average experience.

My quest to fix Qwest line

It had been about 14 months since I'd had any telecom snafus at the office. Suddenly, on Sept. 29, my receptionist could no longer forward calls to my voicemail.

Between a volatile stock market and the Bernie Madoff's of the world, it's kind of important that clients be able to reach their financial planner. So, my No. 1 priority became finding out what happened.

Qwest, my telecom provider, blamed our PBX, while our PBX guy was pretty sure it was Qwest. Since our PBX guy was right the last time we had such an issue, I put my money on him.

Six hours and many calls later, Qwest determined it was their "software upgrade" that did it. I hadn't been informed about this upgrade because, according to Qwest, it only impacted 1 percent of their customers, so it wasn't a big deal. And maybe it wasn't, to them.

Identifying and fixing the problem turned out to be two very different things.

Instead of being able to rely on Qwest's claims that it would be working the next morning, I had to wrangle with customer service from the airport on my cell phone. When my repeated requests to speak to a supervisor were met with the customer service rep's repeated response of "no," I asked if he would at least document that I was being denied a supervisor.

He maddeningly responded: "No because that would not be accurate."

After going through this loop a few times, I realized I must be caught in a time warp and actually dealing with the monopoly phone company of a quarter century ago, before the breakup of Bell Telephone.

Like Indiana Jones in search of the Holy Grail, I finally made my way to that supervisor I'd requested, who, later that day, got my voicemail working. It would probably have been more of a victory if it hadn't required I

waste more than a dozen hours.

Samsung: "A better world"?

I could go on and on with the anecdotes of my 30-day pursuit to get my Samsung printer repaired or replaced.

I had to deal with a rogue "Texas Service Center" that claimed to report to no one. After I got a senior officer of Samsung involved, the service center gave me some strong evidence they were right as they didn't seem to respond to him either.

The art of complaining

I hate the fact that American customer service jobs are going overseas but, unfortunately, all my examples are of American home grown nightmares.

I did, however, get my blinds, my voicemail back and the printer replaced.

Home Depot (which didn't select the shipper) was kind enough to refund a large portion of the cost of the blinds, and even Qwest gave me a credit for my time. I fought back by following these simple rules:

- Take down names, employee numbers and telephone extensions.
- Demand to speak to a supervisor — don't take no for an answer. The rep is less likely to deny you if they know you have their name and employee number.
- If the escalation doesn't work, call the corporate office and demand to speak to the CEO.
- Ask for a written response and give them the facts, with names, numbers and dates.
- Be demanding — they have taken your time and should give you something in return ... in addition to a whopping headache.

Customer service might be on the decline, but that doesn't mean your expectations have to decline along with it. When you receive customer disservice for your hard-earned money, don't hesitate to stand up and fight back.

Allan Roth, a CPA and Certified Financial Planner, is the founder of Wealth Logic LLC and the author of "How a Second Grader Beats Wall Street." He can be reached at 955-1001 or ar@DareToBeDull.com.