

When did we stop caring about customer service, client experience?

 By [Lindsay Grubb](#)

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I just went through the unpleasant process of upgrading my cellphone. I did everything in my power to mitigate any stress I might have by phoning my service provider's upgrades department, prior to physically entering their world to pick up my new iPhone. I felt strong walking into the customer service department and was sure it should take at most an hour to process everything and get back to my office. Boy was I wrong.

I eventually left their world three hours later after receiving surly service from numerous people wearing smiley face t-shirts. I stood in many long, slow-moving queues and battled to find staff, in all but one of the stores, approachable and eager to assist.

My sim was not activated that night as it should have been, because the consultant who did my upgrade lost the paperwork and I had to lose my cool many times to get it eventually activated at 2:30pm the next afternoon. On the Monday I discovered that my brand new iPhone had a flaw under the screen and had to brave the cold, snowy conditions on Tuesday to return it to have it swapped out for a new one. Never once in the 24-hour debacle was my request to speak with a manager granted. It made me see red even more.

From fun to foul

The whole experience soured what should have been a lot of fun. The first customer service consultant I dealt with summed the whole experience up for me when she suggested I should be going with the opposition. Perhaps I should have but sometimes it is a case of better the devil you know.

There were so many missed opportunities when it came to delivering a great customer experience. It could have come from a smile, a chair to sit on so I didn't have to stand for twenty minutes at a time, or a shared pride in our country when I made small talk about how well we have done in the Olympics.

Instead of educating me on what I needed to make my new phone work, they sent me away assuming I would know how to operate it, even when they knew I was coming from a different brand. Instead I phoned my brother and he took me through everything I had to do.

I know my experience was not unique - I know everyone is constantly complaining about their service providers. I just wonder when all of these cellular giants will make a move towards creating real value, rather than perceived value for their customers.

In this hyper consumer-driven world we live in where we're constantly battling about terms like CRM and espousing the benefits of creating the ideal customer service experience it is all still just lip service. We don't seem to be making any progress.

I've been with my cellular provider for 15 years and from the way they treat me and the way they raise my blood pressure, they clearly don't care about me. I'm just another R620 a month to them.

Does size matter?

The next day I visited my local Vet Deli to get the specialised dog food which I have not been able to find in any store from Midrand to Broadacres for the past month. The manufacturer has had a problem with supply and this is having a serious effect on my dogs' health. I managed to get two small packets and the weekend store manager apologised that they didn't have the stock and explained the situation. He then asked how many bags I went through a month and then asked if he could put in an order specifically for those two bags for me and deliver them to my home during the upcoming week.

On Monday morning I received a call from the store manageress to say that she saw I had been in and my request and had placed the order and it should be available the next day. I told her I would collect it, that they didn't need to deliver, as I would be in the centre the next day. Tuesday morning brought another call from the manageress to say the stock had arrived and had been put away for me.

It was an all-round positive experience and I felt that the staff cared about my dogs and me. It took a potential negative and turned it into a positive, with just a few short phone calls. They ensured that I will continue to return and will continue to happily speak highly of them and their customer service levels.

Why were they able to give me better service than the giant conglomerate down the road? Does size count? Is it easier for smaller companies to give a better customer experience? Is it because they're smaller that they realise the cost of losing even just one customer?

Here's what I think. I believe that regardless of the size of your company, it is entirely possible to give fabulous service. How do you do it? It's not rocket science and it's been said many times before:

- Give your staff the training they need on products and services so they can answer customer queries without sending them somewhere else
- Encourage your staff to respond to your clients in the manner they would like to be treated if they were the customer
- Support your staff and be available as management, to answer a client query when it escalates past the point of a junior / entry level engagement
- Treat your staff with dignity and respect and they'll do the same for your customers
- Give your staff a reason to come in to work in the morning aside from their salary. (The staff I encountered were clearly not happy in their jobs and it reflected in their service, so something is clearly not working on your back-end when it comes to making your company a great place to work and no smiley face t-shirt is going to change that - sorry)

If you've experienced bad service recently - what would have made a difference for you personally? How could things have turned from a negative to a positive experience? I'd love to hear your thoughts.

ABOUT LINDSAY GRUBB

I am a Johannesburg-based freelance writer and editor with a talent for crafting well-researched, strategically aligned, and professionally written communications and searching out and telling interesting brand stories that create interest in and loyalty to brands. I have worked with local and international clients for the past 20 years.

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