Customers Want Good News - But What If You Have Bad News?

All of us want to hear good news when we transact business in our everyday lives. Hearing good news from a service provider makes us perceive the experience to be more positive. “Yes, we have that in stock,” makes us happy, while, “I’m sorry, we won’t have that until the end of the month,” probably makes us unhappy.

Even though we, as service providers, don’t always have good news for our students and their parents, we can employ strategies to make bad news sound not so bad.

1. Use positive language. The wording and tone used to deliver a message help shape its perception. Instead of saying, “You won’t be able to use the system until next Friday,” say, “You may begin using the system next Friday.” Always tell the customer what you or they can do, not what you or they can’t do.

2. Deliver the bad news first, then the good. A customer service interaction is generally perceived as positive if it ends on a positive note, even if portions of the interaction are negative. Leaving a positive last impression is a key to customer satisfaction.

3. Provide a reason for the bad situation. Customers are likely to be less unhappy if they understand why a bad situation occurred. If there was a problem beyond your control, say so, and apologize. If it was your fault, say so, and apologize. If the situation occurred because the customer did something wrong, say so, but don’t blame the customer.

4. Empathize and help. Actively listen to your customers’ complaints, especially if the bad situation was not their fault. Apologize and try to offer options they can pursue. Do all you can to help - even if the situation is the customer’s fault. Providing great service is part of our jobs as professional service providers.

Sources: Darrell Zahorsky, MindLeaders.com, careerbuilder.com, Decker Associates, Inc.
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