

BUSINESS OWNERS: KEEP THIS CRISIS CONTROL DIRECTIVES IN YOUR FILES: LESSONS FROM UNITED AIRLINES

San Diego, CA, 2017-Apr-18 — /EPR Network/ — Every company has a crisis from time to time. If the company is small or medium in size, one crisis can take it off the map. Here are some directives that will get you through your next one; share it with your senior staff and don't read it 'after' the event occurred, this should be in memory lest you compete with United for news space.

1. TRY TO RESOLVE IT WITH SOMETHING THAT COMES EASILY TO YOU, THAT YOUR CUSTOMER VALUES. Whatever business you are in, you get your goods or services wholesale (free flights, even on a standby basis). Try to resolve the problem by offering something that has a high perceived value but is not so dear to you that it creates a large loss. The customer is 'not' always right, but the customer can write something about you on Yelp and, as it hurts you more to respond, they will 'seem' right to the public, who will only read one side of it all.

2. AVOID CALLING THE POLICE (of any kind) FOR A NON-CRIMINAL INCIDENT. Once you try to make the police force your own, and they step in with people who are trained to control others, you will have alienated your client past the point of no return. Worse yet, if the person flails and touches a police officer, he or she now gets a criminal record thanks to you and believe me, you will pay dearly for that. As stupid goes, this is the most stupid move a company can use against a client when the company is not at threat. A disagreement is never resolved when one party is fully armed and the other is afraid of arrest.

3. SHOW THEM WHO THE MANAGEMENT REALLY IS, AND DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION FOR THE SITUATION. If your story makes it to social media, the first response from the CEO should be an instant public apology. The public needs to think of him or her as a nice, warm, empathetic individual who just had the bad luck of hiring someone who had no common sense. Mistakes happen. The public forgives you. If, on the other hand the CEO makes a bad impression or supports his or her staff, regardless of their poor choices, then people will fear the company and avoid it all costs. Do you understand?

4. DO NOT ANGER A CUSTOMER AND THEN ACCUSE HIM OR HER WITH BEING BELIGERENT. This is a common tactic used by the police to arrest persons. Lawyers use it at trial all the time. You say something inflammatory, the person reacts, and you try to show the jury how unreasonable they are. This is dangerous behavior. Unless you have the powers of arrest, you shouldn't do something to further anger your customer. If you have an angry customer, you should do everything you can to get them to a reasonable and calm state. The easiest way to do so: Offer something up front, then dine or have drinks with him or her in a casual manner and work out the rest. Using this system you may create the most loyal customer (who refers you business) when you are finished. People understand errors occur: it's how you handle them.

5. IF YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING EMPATHETIC KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT. A client/customer may upset you. They are in a heated state due to what happened. Don't get offended. Many of them don't even mean what they say in the heat of the moment. If you can avoid internalizing the person's comments, try to mentally experience the situation from their point of view. The easiest way to do it is not to think of them, but to think of one of your parents, your spouse, or your best friend having gone through this and how you would respond. Now do this with your client.

6. BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR WORDS AND POSITIONING OF YOUR FIRM.

It's easy to say and do what you want when you have a golden parachute. However, a corporation's reputation is largely based on the philosophies of the CEO when it comes to customer service. Remember the corporation took care of you and your family when you were looking for a career or

opportunity. Now, it needs 'you'. Do everything with all the integrity the company deserves, even if you have to bite your lip in doing so.

7. MAKE CONTACT WITH THE AGGRIEVED PARTY ASAP. Call the person, arrange a personal contact and work things out. Do not let it get to the media or to a lawyer's office. Let the person hear from you and know that you care. The difference it will make is phenomenal. It does not matter that you are on vacation when it takes place or even sleeping. You are better off losing a night's sleep than months of sleep in the future while your and your company's reputation are in the balance. Don't just contact the party, make this up to them. For example, in the United Airlines' case, I would have put Dr Dao on a private jet asap, with a limousine waiting at the other end. The scenario would have turned out very differently.

8. WORK IT OUT BEFORE IT BECOMES A LAWSUIT.

If a situation is so out of control that a lawyer has been hired or litigation is threatened, resolve it immediately through opposing counsel. Negotiate and work out a settlement or understanding of some sort. Keep the settlement confidential if you have to, or be generous and go public with it; especially if you are in the wrong. The worst thing that can happen in this case is what happened with United Airlines: the lawyer was enjoying free national airtime to say what he wanted.

If a lawyer has been hired, you did not follow the rules above very well. Once the legal game is in play, it will only serve to infuriate the customer more and the legal game is all about sides. At this point, hope the party has a reasonable lawyer as you can no longer directly communicate with the person. Litigation is one of the worst diseases a company can catch, avoid it at all costs.

We hope your next crisis is averted rapidly and wish you the best!

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