

Don't Ruin the Sale with a Lousy Dessert

After great deliberation you finally made the decision to dine at a new restaurant that recently received rave reviews. The initial greeting was impressive and the server was friendly and professional and seemed very knowledgeable. Your first course was tasty, your main course was cooked to perfection and both were presented in a visually appealing manner. However, as the meal progressed, the waiter dropped the ball. He seemed too busy and began to neglect your table. When you finally ordered dessert and received it, it was well below average. You planned to mention this to your server but you couldn't catch your server's attention. By the time he finally returned to your table all you wanted to do was to pay the bill and leave.

Many a great meal has been ruined by a lousy dessert and many good movies have been spoiled by a bad ending. Unfortunately, this also happens in the sales world.

The sales person successfully courts the prospect through all stages of the sales process but once the main sale has been confirmed, he disappears to take care of other customers. He is slow to return calls and is less attentive than he was earlier. After all, the sale has been made so it doesn't, right? Perhaps, but let's take a look at the implications of failing to deliver a complete meal.

Making a great first impression and understanding your customer's situation is the appetizer. Effectively managing the sales process, differentiating yourself from the competition, and demonstrating why your customer should buy your product, service or solution is the main course. But it is critical to remember that a great meal includes dessert. That means you need to consistently execute until the very end of the sale.

We all know that executing a sale often requires the help of other people in the company and that unforeseen problems arise. Just because you made the initial sale doesn't mean the job is over especially if you rely on others to help you execute the sale or implement the solution. And in today's competitive business world, the possibility for errors has increased because most organizations are running lean which means employees are pressed for time and often forget to follow through, overlook details, or make mistakes. Let's look at this from a customer's perspective for a moment.

My wife and I once had home renovations done and we selected a company that had done work for us on two previous occasions. The contractor executed the first

80-85 percent of work (the appetizer and main course) very well. The crew was friendly, professional and accommodating. The quality of their work was excellent, and as the job progressed, my wife and I were more than satisfied. However, during the latter part of the project (dessert), we encountered several challenges and the crew that was assigned to our project was unable to do the work. This meant that getting the final work completed to our satisfaction was extremely challenging. We talked to the contractor and he was quick to make excuses and even attempted to direct some responsibility to us. Although we reached an agreement and the job was completed, we had to push hard to get the last bit of work done to our liking and that left a sour taste in our mouth; an experience that might prevent us from using that company again. Although the project started well, it was spoiled by a poor finale. The appetizer and main course was great, the dessert wasn't.

Your customers want dessert. They want a complete meal. Your customers don't care how busy you are. They don't want to hear your problems; they have enough of their own. They don't want to hear excuses. They want the product, service or solution that you promised. It doesn't matter that someone in another department made a mistake or failed to do what they were supposed to. Your customer doesn't care if you are bogged down with other projects. If you fail to deliver, you run the risk of damaging your reputation along with your company's. The mistake or problem may be minor in your eyes but if this situation is one of the last points of contact your customer has with you, the impact may be lasting.

Remember, a great sale can quickly turn sour if all aspects of that deal have not been effectively executed and managed.

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