



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Broadcast Operations **Customer Service in the Station**



By Kevin Trueblood

[April 2010] Unfortunately, all too often the majority of contact that station staff has with the engineer is during times of pressure. Something is wrong: the transmitter is off the air, the server has crashed, something has broken - and everyone has become frustrated. How the situation is resolved says a lot about how each person involved views the others.

Engineers place a lot of value on customer service. We base a lot of purchasing decisions on which companies offer the best customer service. Whether it is from the sales rep who knows the names of your family members or from the tech whose cell phone number you have and can call any time, we all value those who can help you get your job done.

SERVICING MORE THAN GEAR

While a lot of our job is solving and preventing technical problems, a big part of our job essentially is in customer service. Our customers are the station staff - the people whose work is made possible in large part because of what we do.

How would your station staff rate your service? Are you the “go-to” guy when something happens, and known as a helpful and patient person? Or are you the grumpy curmudgeon who never gets things done for them?

Which type do *you* prefer when you call tech support?

THE ISSUE IS CUSTOMER SERVICE

I have seen engineers on both sides of that spectrum. The station staff really does appreciate the helpful and patient types, the ones who respond as promptly as possible to problems and taught teach the staff how to deal with further problems.

The other kind of engineer really ends up creating an unfortunate situation for the staff. When they approach the grumpy engineer they learn to expect being talked to in a condescending tone or yelled at about the problem (whether it was their fault or not), and told the problem will be fixed eventually.

The staff ends up afraid of approaching the Engineer, and accordingly, problems often go unresolved or made worse because no attention is given.

PROBLEMS AFFECT EVERYONE

It is easy to forget about problems when there is a list of them. Remember, a problem is not only a problem for you, but for the other person too.

For example, if the transmitter is off, yes the pressure is on you if you are the engineer. But the station is also off the air for everyone else, too. And they do not know what is the problem or how long it will take to restore the signal. In other words, they are at your mercy, not just for repairs, but for information.

So, when your hand is in the exciter of a dead transmitter, and the Sales Manager calls to ask how much longer you are going to be off the air, what do you do? Yell at them for even asking such a “stupid question?” Or give them an honest and direct answer so you can both get back to work? You truly may feel annoyed for being asked but the Sales Manager has to explain to a client why their promotion will not run that afternoon. (Of course, if they keep calling every five minutes, that is another story!)

Which response will contribute to good “customer relations?”

UNDERSTANDING THEIR VIEWPOINT

It is getting tougher and tougher these days to be patient and understanding when we are stretched thin and have limited resources.

One day it occurred to me there are several people on staff with whom I speak only when something is wrong. Their only impressions of me are almost always at those times when I am stressed and frustrated. This was especially true when I was doing contract work and taking trouble calls from someone in another city I had never even met before.

Yet, many on the staff typically feel helpless when it comes to problems. The afternoon jock does not know the microphone preamp blew up in the studio, he just knows he cannot do a live break until you come and fix it. The traffic manager rarely knows how to solve a “printer not found” problem – and might even be afraid to do anything – but without the log, everything will come to a bad halt.

Now more than ever, being able to exhibit “Grace under fire” is very important. How you behave under stress and frustration is critical.

BALANCING PRIORITIES

When you cannot make regular transmitter rounds because you have got three “I can’t print” issues it can be frustrating. However, you have to remember those are real people with whom you are dealing – people who genuinely need your help.

There is a long argument about which department of the station is superior than the others. Without programming there would be nothing to sell, without sales there would be no paychecks, without the engineer, the place would be quiet, etc.

The reality is everyone exists because everyone exists. Engineering's job makes it possible for everyone else to do their job. So if you have to maintain an email server, you have to make sure the station staff can use it. When there are problems take care of both the server *and the people* who use it.

I am not saying that every time you answer the phone it has to be sunshine and roses. We all have bad days. But a little understanding for the people on the other end of the phone goes a long way in getting things accomplished and establishing a good rapport with the staff.

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[Return to The BDR Menu](#)