

Take a Walk in Their Shoes

by [Steve Brown](#)

We attended a sales training meeting recently and know what you are probably thinking - bla, bla, bla, sell, sell, sell. After all, these sorts of things can be total drudgery where some consultant who may have never sold anything babbles on about the same old stuff. Those of us who have been around awhile have certainly been to our fair share of training like this and some are better than others to be sure. No matter the type though, something of value almost always surfaces so we don't usually mind.

This most recent meeting was a bit different, as it looked at customer service and specifically at communications with customers and prospects from a different direction. There were ideas that were simple and quite easy to execute, but from the opposite standpoint than most organizations usually operate in their client communication. In the end, the meeting turned a few old paradigms on their heads.

Community bankers know a lot about customer service already because it is the basis of the business model. Community bankers take care of their customers and employees and treat everyone as they would like to be treated themselves. What was new with this event was the idea of really designing and communicating your enterprise's offerings and customer service through the eyes of the customer.

To see how well you are doing, take a moment and open up the splash page of your website. Then put on a mental pair of customer glasses and see things from their eyes. If it centers on what your bank does best, likes to do and makes money doing, give yourself a "needs improvement" grade. Think whether the messages are from the standpoint of the person who comes into your bank (physically or digitally) as an existing customer or as a potential new one. Are you communicating from their viewpoint?

You might think people come into banks looking for help with financial tasks (transactional business) or for financing solutions (loans). You might think they are seeking out areas like trust, investment management or international money transfers. Really, people come to the bank looking for ease of use, friendly people, competence and the products they need to take care of their financial needs.

The good news is that most bank products are usually designed with customer needs in mind. The problem occurs when documents and communications for even the simplest of services end up on a long detour. That makes sense since this is a highly regulated industry, so compliance folks and many others all add their touches along the way. Pages of terms and fee schedules, privacy policies, opt in or opt out and many other forms or agreements are common. Much of it is necessary, but plenty is not. Even for the required parts, your bank may want to provide a helpful summary to navigate the terms on your products, in addition to the legal documents. Do this with the blessing of your bank's compliance department of course...

What customers want most is to understand what they are buying and to know that it will help them accomplish what they are trying to do. Take a hard look at your products from the customer viewpoint and ask whether some are redundant, overdone or underused? Ask some of your best customers

what they think you should offer or whether they just don't like some products. You may be pleased (the shoe fits), or find there is work to be done (the shoe size is too small), but you will certainly have walked in their shoes so you will know.

BANK NEWS

M & A

Stonegate Bank (\$1.1B, FL) will buy Florida Shores Bank Southeast (\$178mm, FL) and Southwest (\$376mm, FL) for \$48.8mm.

Out

JPMorgan Chase said effective Oct 12 it will stop accepting student loan applications for loans, citing competition from federal lending programs. A spokesperson for Chase said the private student loan market had declined 75% in 5Ys, so they were refocusing resources into other areas.

Concentration

UMB Bank (\$15.0B, MO) is reporting a singular customer representing 7.42% of total deposits (\$1.08B) is moving somewhere else in the next 120 days. The bank said in an SEC filing that if all the funding were replaced in the near term, earnings per share in 2014 could drop by \$0.04 to \$0.09.

Hackers

Research by online security company Hotspot Shield finds 98% of data targeted by attackers in 2012 was payment data. It was followed by confidential information/intellectual property (2%), electronic protected health information (1%) and business financial account numbers (1%). The numbers add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

Why Customers Leave

Research by Customers That Stick finds 82% of consumers say they stopped doing business with a company due to a poor customer experience. Of this group, 73% said it was due to rude staff, 55% said it was because their issue was not resolved in a timely fashion and 51% said it was due to unknowledgeable staff. Bankers should take note and continue to train customer facing staff in these areas.

Targeted Savings

Banks should note Sallie Mae says only 25% of parents who save for college use a 529 plan. Maybe you can help your customers help themselves.

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