

A Modern Fairy Tale?

By Cheryl Crumb

While many Grimm fairy tales have evil queens and fire-breathing dragons, they're usually not as frightening as modern tales of customer service, like this one.

Once upon a time, there was a bank that set customer focus as its goal. Goldilocks, the princess in our story, was cooking for her seven dwarves when the telephone rang. She heard an automated voice said, "Please hold for an important call from the XYZ Bank for someone at this number." There was an audible click, music, and she was put on hold... and hold... and hold. Stunned, our princess stayed glued to the receiver waiting, for over 30 seconds, until she asked herself, "why am I doing this?" and she hung up.

The next evening the phone rang again and it was deja-vu all over: Robot voice – click - muzak - hold. A quick study, Goldilocks disconnected after 20 seconds.

The third day, a real-life person from the bank called asking to speak to one of the dwarves. He stated that monies were owing. The princess passed on the message to Grumpy. Payment was made. Three weeks passed. "Thank goodness", thought our princess, "No more cybercalls." Wrong!

Ring-ring. The robotic voice made its familiar request to hold – click – music. Determined to connect with a human, she waited... 3-4-5 minutes, still music. Resignedly she declared the phone the winner, and hung up. Dashing to her computer, she emailed, "If you want to contact a customer, putting them on hold and expecting them to wait until you are ready to talk to them is not a good way to endear them to your company."

Instantly a reply appeared. Seems that the automated phone voice was also capable of automated email messages. Goldilocks read, "Thank you for your comments which are very important to us. We will get back to you." No name.

Several hours later a second email arrived, this time from a real life service provider with a mother and a father and a name. The message said, "I apologize that you are receiving automated calls from XYZ that immediately place you on hold. I appreciate the time you have taken to write back, as your feedback is important for improving the way we do business. I would like to help you with your concerns. Could you please send me your full name, address and phone number? This information will help a representative contact you. Thank you

for your patience." "Wonderful", our princess thought, with rising expectations..." Santa Claus does exist."

Another email arrived: "Thank you for sending the information that I requested. I have forwarded your email to our Customer Care Department and they will direct your concerns to a representative from the appropriate business area for response. Your feedback is important to us. Thank you for taking the time to bring your concerns to our attention."

True to his word, the following day Mr. Customer Care called Goldilocks.

Bank: "We've been through all your records. It's not you the bank is calling, but someone else at your number."

Princess: "How would I know it's not for me?"

Bank: "Well, how would we know you were the one answering?"

Princess: "(Frustration) Never mind... why is the bank making these calls?"

Bank: "Our system lines up the calls and sometimes there are more than we can handle. That's why customers have to wait."

Princess: "Don't you think that's annoying?"

Bank: "It's the best way for us to do it."

Princess: (Anger) "Never mind... please stop making the calls."

Bank: "The calls weren't placed by us. We're the Marketing Division. The calls were placed by the Payment Centre. We've made a note for the people in our department not to place automated calls to your number."

Princess: "Then please tell the Payment Centre to stop their calls. The payment has been taken care of."

Bank: "I told you, it's not us who's calling, it's the Payment Centre."

Princess: (Sound of blood pressure rising) "But it's the XYZ Bank and you work for the XYZ Bank."

Bank: "I'm sorry, it's not our department."

Princess: (Suicidal thoughts) "Well, what can you do?"

Bank: "We can't do anything. I suggest you contact them and tell them to stop the calls."

Princess: (Grrrrr....) Click

The crowning touch! The next day Goldilocks received another email from her banking knight in rusty armour: "Thank you for contacting us and giving us the opportunity to help you."

As a holy book tells us, forgive them for they know not what they do!

Is the bank Evil Incarnate? From the bank's perspective, they had good intentions.

- They immediately acknowledged receipt of the princess's email.
- A customer service rep personally followed up in writing.
- The same customer service rep promised action in another email.
- The Marketing service provider made a timely phone call.

But customers assess organizations, not on intentions, but on effect. And it's influenced by the entire experience. Here's the moral of the story:

- Automation can improve efficiencies, not relationships.
- Robot-click-muzak-wait.....conveys the message: "If you owe us money, you're second-class, and you'll just have to wait until we're ready to talk to you." It's not a promising way to begin.
- Customers don't care which department a service provider works for. You are the company.
- Where's accountability? The first line of contact is the person who the customer holds responsible.
- Excuses ! The only person who believes an excuse is the person who makes it! They communicate the message: "it's not my fault and I can't do anything."
- Where's the caring, the concern for the customer? Where's the genuine empathy for Goldilock's journey down the rabbit hole?
- Customers are looking for solutions. Goldilocks is still looking!
- What did our heroine get for her efforts: 40 minutes of lost time, frustration, high blood pressure, and a suspicious twinge every time the phone rings.

Did the story end happily ever after? Only when Goldilocks and her seven dwarves switched banks.

Do you think the bank knows why?

