

# Getting To Third Base....Almost There

By Cheryl Crumb

The runner is poised at second base...the big picture and details are clearly understood by the service provider. How do we push on to third base? We've now earned the right to provide even greater value, to assist our customer. To get clarity on the subtleties of this role, let's give a demo of what NOT to do:

"Ms. McGillicuddy, I see that there's only one system that will best serve you. It's the Omega Chartreuse Model with Neo-Dolby Sound and Optional Mosquito netting priced at \$1763 plus tax."

Why is that a "no no"? It's the equivalent of going to a restaurant and having the server rip the menu from your hand and say, "I'll bring you the liver and onions. It's perfect. You've love it."

## Research repeatedly reveals the following:

1. There's always more than one solution for any problem or opportunity.
2. The most creative solutions occur after discussion and brainstorming.
3. The first idea is usually the most obvious, previously tried, and not necessarily the best.
4. Solution possibilities which involve the customer increase their buy-in and acceptance.
5. Customers are delighted (vs. "satisfied") when service offers include something they hadn't even thought of.

Therefore, our service provider's role of assistance can be broken down into the following steps:

1. Offer information to educate the customer.
2. Offer alternatives that you see. Invite ideas from the customer.
3. Guide a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
4. Clarify what you will be able to do and won't be able to do.
5. Get the customer's agreement.

Too often, technical service providers think that the options are limited to product. Consider that from the customer's vantage the actual product is only part of the solution. Her focus is on an implemented solution. That usually includes factors such as payment and terms, installation, training, and servicing.

Let me share a story to make the point more vivid. I was recently in Florida visiting my mum who is in her 70's and no longer able to master the 100 meter dash. As a southern couch potato, she thrives on home entertainment. Thus, time to give up the white T.V. which adorned the paneled rec room when I was a teenager and the Beta (yes, you heard me) VCR. May they rest in peace! I went to two well-known electronic retail outlets to view the second millennium version of these entertainment systems.

## Store #1 – Let's call it "Indifference R Us"

The good news was that I was able to freely roam the aisles viewing all models on display. Why? The two sales clerks were engaged in a discussion about the Monday night football game and my presence wasn't as entertaining as the replay of the quarterback sack. When I finally was able to drag one of them away to ask a few questions, he pointed to the brochures provided by the manufacturers. Without asking me a single question, he fingered a T.V. well beyond my mum's price range, and said, "that's the best buy here". I felt I could see what his little brain was thinking: "And that's the one with the best commission for me". I left. He shrugged.

## Store #2 – Let's call it "Assistance R Us"

Again, two sales clerks chatting in a corner. Do they teach this down south as a sales technique? Happy surprise: one approached me and greeted me warmly. After my tentative, "just looking at TV's and VCR's", he engaged me in conversation. He learned that my immobile mum was located nearby,

wore hearing aids, was more of a visual appreciator than audiophile, was non-mechanical, lived alone, suffered from osteoporosis, had no technocrat neighbours to give her assistance, had to rely on cabs for transportation, wore glasses, lived on her pension, had an apartment living room that was 12 feet by 14 feet....

At this point, I almost wanted to marry the guy....nobody had shown this much interest in me or my mum ever! His recommendations? Option Package #1 – Brand X 27" TV and same brand VCR with a taller-than-normal stand. Not only would they deliver the merchandise for free, but he would arrange for installers to connect the cable and TV and VCR. They would teach her how to use the remote (something that didn't come with her prehistoric television), program the equipment, and they would cart away her old stuff (which was h-e-a-v-y). The advantages: This was their simplest model and it didn't include lots of features that she probably wouldn't use. Because the TV was located near her favourite chair, the screen size was adequate. Same brand TV and VCR meant she would only need to use one remote control. The taller stand meant that she wouldn't have to bend as far when inserting videos. The Consumers Reports showed that these models had excellent audio clarity, something important for the hard-of-hearing. He also gave me the phone number of local video stores that delivered videos. Option Package #2 – Brand X 32" TV screen with the above VCR. All other enhancements were included. He worked out an optional living room layout where the TV could be better viewed. He offered me warranty packages and explained what might be appropriate for her. I made my decision on the spot. I could have gone back to "Indifference R Us" for a price comparison, but I didn't. Why give the first weasel my business just to save me a few pennies?

It was all done as promised. I left Florida content in the knowledge that my mum could maneuver her new tailor-made entertainment system. Was I delighted? You bet!

The moral of the story: excellent service providers help their customers make the decisions that are best for them.

## Customer Relationship Diamond

