

## **I Just Want My Pants**

**The customer wants action, not an excuse**

*Jeffrey Gitomer*

When a customer calls and has a question, a concern, or a complaint, the first words out of your mouth set the tone for the transaction. And those words lay the foundation for the future of the relationship.

The bad news. More than 90% of the people in sales or service don't give an answer, they give an excuse. The only good news is that only 80% of the 90% go to your competition.

I went to return a pair of pants that had a hole in the pocket. All I wanted was another pair of pants. On the surface, it seemed pretty simple. Except for the fact that the store has policies and procedures that precluded me from getting a pair of pants.

Here's the exchange. Did I have a receipt? No. Did I buy the pants on a credit card? Yes. Did I have the credit card number? Yes. We'll look it up on our central bookkeeping office. Unfortunately, the central bookkeeping office has no record of your purchase.

I said, "Keep the pants. If you ever figure out what to do, here's my card."

I soon got a call from the store's general manager telling me all about how the business operates and why the poor salesclerk could not give me new pants. I told the general manager I wasn't really interested in how the store operated. I was interested only in pants. Could she get me some pants?

She began to tell me about her procedures and I said, "Stop! You have my address. You have my pants. If you can send me a new pair, that would be the greatest. If you can't, I totally understand. Just keep them and lose my business for the next 20 years."

Three pairs of pants arrived today. I could select the one I wanted and send the other two back. No charge. No papers. No procedures. Just pants.

The store could have done this and generated a "wow!" on the service meter. But no, it chose to satisfy me at the last moment, after almost all hope was gone, in an effort to salvage my business.

The moral of the lesson: It's the same in your business. Every day, your customers call with a problem or complaint. The first thing you do is tell the customer why it happened, why it wasn't really your fault, why the computers went down, why the credit department made an error, why your order didn't get shipped or some other excuse.

All the customer wants is a friendly, helpful service and an answer.

If you're worried about how much it will cost to remedy customers' problems and provide real solution, let me remind you of my customer-service adage: It never costs as much to fix the problem as it does to not fix the problem.