



Caswell **CORPORATE COACHING** Company
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NEWSLETTER
June 2013
Volume 13, Issue 6



William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives around the globe. The author of 14 books, Bill has penned the 12-book series *The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence* and keeping it there.

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Responding to Angry Clients

Frequently we respond in kind, (emotionally and defensively) to an angry client not realizing that such a response doesn't suit the situation but, even more damaging, not realizing that we may be losing a wonderful opportunity for more business.

Yes, a customer complaint is a wise marketer's dream, a situation to be nurtured, expanded upon, and benefitted from. We will be discussing two complementary actions related to responding to an angry client. (a) The first is how to handle the call deftly and to your own advantage. (b) The second action is how (and why) this frustrating occurrence can be turned into a sales (bonding) opportunity for you with that client. (Next month's paper will deal with the sales advantage.)

How to Handle the Call

When a client calls in a state of frustration, your primary action must be to deal with that person's anger. Your primary action is NOT to assuage your own ego, and NOT to defend your company's high quality standards, but simply to deflate the client's anger.

Why? If you don't deflate the anger of the caller, you cannot move successfully onto the next step. So now the question is: Do you want to move successfully onto the next step? I have to assume your answer is 'Yes, of course'. So, quit thinking about you and start thinking about the other – the angry client on the phone. (By the way, should the client come to you via email with anger, do not respond by email, but pick up the phone to deal with the matter verbally – and as suggested in this paper.)

You think: "The client is way off track; we didn't do that. I'll show him why!" WRONG STRATEGY! That is because any effort to defend is saying to the angry client: "You don't know what you are talking about!" and the client is in no mood to hear such a thing. The customer's brain is in the fight-or-flight mode with its 45 physiological, primed-up, bodily changes ready to take you on and win. How dare you suggest to a raging bull that he's not in control. "I'll show you," the person says, or thinks – and the battle escalates. An escalating battle always has two losers, so you will join the rank of loser – and this paper is trying to help you stay a winner. We are dealing with two issues here and let us not confuse them. The first is the client's anger; the second is the problem itself. We must get the anger out of the way before we have any chance of successfully dealing with the problem before us. So focus on where we must focus now – on the anger.

When you get the call, show empathy for the client's state of the moment. "I am sorry you are angry" or "That's unfortunate" something to convey to the client you appreciate that they are in an undesirably excited state. (Remember, we are not yet looking at the problem – don't even allow your mind to wander near the problem.) Next, hear the client out fully without the need to defend. ("No; that's impossible", etc. will get you nowhere – even if true. We are not in a situation of determining right or wrong but in the situation of defusing strong emotions.)

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Bill Caswell is always available for comments or questions at:

bill@caswellccc.com

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CCCC
Ottawa Canada
613-232-1243
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As the client lays out the story, let the person know you are hearing and listening, with: "I see." "I understand."

If, instead, you defend, the client will assume you cannot hear the concern and the anger will escalate. It has to – and you alone will have made it escalate. Of course, you will be further away from getting towards a mutual solution.

Once the client has listed out the issues, read back your understanding of what has been said (even if you don't agree). Precede the item with, "You said that..." By now the client will be calm because you are acknowledging the individual's concerns and the purpose for the client's call has a chance of working out – i.e. to get a poorly viewed situation rectified.

Go through each point and explain what you will do about them. If you have the power to resolve some of the points, do that right away. For all other points you should show specific action of 'what' and 'when'. "I will go to the shipping department and investigate what you have said. I will get back to you by the end of the day." And then, make sure you do.

The raging bull will have become a pacified lamb and now you can mutually find ways to resolve the concerns.

Better still, from this disaster, you have before you an opportunity to strengthen your bond with the client – and only because of the problem – which will be the subject of a follow-on paper.

See you next issue!

Bill