

EVERY PROBLEM HAS A GIFT



TRUE GEMS ARE FOUND IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Leveraging Problems To Build Relationships, Trust, & Image As A Reliable Supplier

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty”

Winston Churchill

Problems and complaints happen:

Your largest customer just called to report they are having a serious problem with one of your products. They inform you that your product caused a major disruption in their operations, and if it isn't resolved immediately, there will be significant consequences for your business and the long-term client relationship.

So is this a problem or a gift?

Most people panic when this happens. They mobilize the entire company, and move heaven and earth in order to “save the business” with their most important customer.

And is this the right thing to do? Absolutely!

Business issues occur every day. It would be wonderful if our products always worked exactly as expected, were delivered 100% on-time, and had flawless execution.

Unfortunately that's not realistic, and regardless of the quality of the product or organization supporting it, issues will occur.

In one of my previous jobs, we had a period in time where we had growing pains and more issues than we would care to admit. At one point during this time, one of my colleagues said to me: “How do we still have any customers? It seems every time I turn around, I have a customer screaming at me.”

My response was: “Every company has issues at one time or another. It’s how you handle those issues in response to the customer’s problem that determines whether or not they remain your customer.”

In fact, often where we had the most serious issues, we were not only able to resolve the problem, but turned the situation into a positive event that improved our overall relationship with the client and gained or enhanced their trust.

The reason was that we looked at every problem as an *opportunity* and worked to find the true gem, the *gift*, during those adverse events.

Are you ready to find the gift ?

I know this concept may sound contrary to reason, but let me explain. Most companies have internal processes for handling complaints. They focus on damage control, saving the business, and resolving the problem as quickly as possible.

They invest a significant amount of time and money during the process and once it’s done, they check off the appropriate boxes on their complaint resolution forms, and move on to the next.

Each issue is viewed as an individual event that has a start and finish. So when it’s done it’s out of sight and out of mind.

However, during that time, both the supplier and customer will invest a significant amount of time and resources. A large number of people including senior management, technical, operations, R&D... from both companies will get involved. But with all the investment in time and money, did they extract any value from all that work besides just resolving the problem? Probably not. Why? Because complaint management processes are designed to resolve the issues, but do not include a mechanism for developing client relationships during those adverse events.

We've found that this is a major area that is often overlooked by even the largest companies, and one that if managed properly can provide significant benefits.

For example, in the cases I mentioned above where we had the most serious issues, we had long standing business with the customer, but unfortunately only had interaction at Manager to Director level, and with only a few key people outside of the Purchasing Department.

We were a supplier not a partner, and although we were deemed to be "a good supplier" we didn't have many opportunities to show our true colors as a company who they would want to have as a true business partner.

The gift

By viewing the adverse event as an opportunity instead of a problem, we were able to focus on building relationships with the larger cross functional team who was now involved.

The internal resources being experts in their areas of expertise were also able to demonstrate their abilities, and position themselves as a resource who the client could leverage in the future.

Now this doesn't just happen. The issues also need to be handled with good communication, empathy for their situation and a drive for developing and acceptable resolution. However if you do all of this, you will be able to redefine the relationship as a dependable partner who will be there in their time of need.

You will be able to develop a level of trust in your competence to handle the situation, and prove yourselves as a reliable company with whom they would like to continue to do business.

The collaboration will also create an opportunity for you to develop broader cross functional relationships. Relationships that will transcend the problem, and position you and your company as a reliable expert with whom the customer will engage regularly to discuss technical issues, and advise on how to resolve future business issues. Once that occurs, you will have developed a significant level of trust and developed your company into the role of a *trusted advisor*.

So view every situation as an opportunity to develop relationships and show off your company's resources and capabilities, find the true gift in every problem, and leverage your company's efforts in the ongoing process of adding value and building trust.

For more information on maximizing your company's efforts to drive client relationships, creating value, and processes for managing client interactions, please contact Triton Consulting at 978-232-1113 or visit us online at www.tritonconsult.com.

** Many thanks to Jackie Comp, for teaching me that "Every problem has a gift". It is one of her basic tenets, that I have learned from and adapted to more situations than I can count.*