

# Customer Service: The Hill You Don't Want To Die On

Charles Marshall, Humorist, Author, and Motivational Speaker

**Remember, the customer is not always right, but he is always the boss.**



I was in Home Depot last week returning a few items that I didn't need. It was a few minutes before closing time and I was in a hurry to make my return and get out of there before the lights went out. I may be a big advocate of the Customer First philosophy, but that doesn't mean that I want to keep people from going home to their families.

So, there I was, second in a line that was going nowhere. I couldn't help but overhear a disagreement between the Home Depot representative and the woman in line in front of me, who was returning a plant she had bought fourteen months earlier. She had no receipt and was demanding the price that she claimed she originally paid for the plant well over a year ago.

The plant only had two or three leaves on it and looked like it was on Death's doorstep. The audacity of the woman floored me. Could I be hearing this right? This lady bought a plant at Home Depot, took it home, killed it, and then returned it more than a year later. She looked to me like she knew she was on shaky ground, but that didn't stop her from pressing forward with her claim.

The truly amazing part of the story is that the Home Depot representative found a way to allow the woman to return the plant and give her what I thought was a very

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generous refund, especially for a dead plant.

The Home Depot rep was able to do this because somewhere way up the Home Depot ladder, someone probably made the wise decision that they would rather be gypped on the occasional return than take a chance on alienating the general public with a stringent return policy. In effect, it appears to me, the consumer, their policy is: "This is not the hill we want to die on. What can we do to keep you happy?"

I love it when companies get this simple point. Yes, every now and then someone will try to take advantage of you, but the business you retain by treating people respectfully and fairly far outweighs the few dollars you miss by overzealously protecting your rights. I memorized a poem a while back that underlines this point

*Here lies the body of Old Tom Quay Who died defending his right of way His cause was just, his will was strong But he's just as dead as if he were wrong.*

Get the point?

When things go wrong in your business world, you can go to war and defend your right-of-way as a businessman (or woman), but is that really what you need to be spending your time doing? Would it not be more prudent to cut your losses and move onto the next sale? Or, better yet, how about graciously handling the problem with the customer and then transitioning that conflict into an opportunity for another sale?

It is possible to get so focused on defending what is yours that you forget to do what you are supposed to be doing: selling, growing, giving, expanding.

Yes, your customer may be unreasonable and demanding. He may be angry and rude. He may be ignorant and selfish. He may be dead wrong. But he's still the one paying the bills.

Remember, the customer is not always right, but he is always the boss.

© 2011 Charles Marshall. Charles Marshall is a nationally known humorous motivational speaker and author. Visit his website at <http://www.charlesmarshall.net> [1] or contact him via e-mail at [charles@charlesmarshall.net](mailto:charles@charlesmarshall.net) [2].

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