

The Old Shoebox Newsletter

Adventures in modern technology by Marlo E. Schuldt

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Customer Support

DO'S and DON'TS



Grandpa! You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar!

I've had the unique opportunity to both provide support and I receive support. Sometimes it makes me feel like I have a split personality.

Recently I finished three week battle trying to replace a new lemon laptop. I finally received a new laptop that could keep the correct time.

One of my class members recently confided that they did not have any idea how to approach getting customer support. That's when I decided to write this little **conundrum**. "A riddle whose answer is or involves a pun (is this a misprint for punishment?). A question or problem having only a conjectural answer. An intricate and difficult problem"- Webster's Dictionary.

Dos



Call Early in the Morning.

The earlier you call the better. You will also spend less time on eternal hold. The best tech support people work during the day. Can you imagine how you would feel toward the end of an eight hour shift talking to angry people? Catch them at the first of their shift. The night crew is typically the second string and will not be able to help as much. Second or third level supervisors are not on duty at night.

Be Prepared. Have the model and serial number in front of you. It's always less embarrassing if they don't hear you yell ouch when you bump your head crawling around on the floor with a flashlight to get the information off the back of your computer. Keep all this information in a notebook or Rolodex for future reference. I had the model number memorized before I finished with my support issue - that's bad!

If you get flustered when you call support, write a little description of the problem you can read or refer to. Go through the details of the problem while you are on infernal hold. By the time you get to talk to someone you will be well rehearsed and more confident!

Use a Speakerphone. Turn the speaker phone on so you can do things with your hands while you are listening to the greatest elevator hits music. You will get more done, be less stressed and your ear will not get as hot and wet.

It will also be easier to type on your keyboard with two hands. *Have you ever noticed that your right hand doesn't know where the keys are on the left side of the keyboard?*

Be Nice and Personable. The tech support staff are really people just like your son or daughter doing a hard job for not much pay. Ask yourself this question. "Would you like to talk to you if you were the support tech?" The correct answer is "yes."

Support will ALWAYS try harder to help a nice person than an irate one. When you start off pushy with me, you will get the very least I have to provide. This is how tech support gets even with difficult people - by giving less.

Often there will be pauses while your tech checks their support material. This is a time when you can carefully make a little small talk. If they stay cold and don't respond don't keep attempting to talk.

I have often found that when I talk on a more personal level that tech support will start to treat me like a real person (grandpa trying to do his best to use and understand his computer). If you're helpful and understanding with them they might treat you the same.

A Personal Story

I used to travel a lot. One day my travel agent shared a real gem with me for use on a rainy day or an impossible travel day - missed flights, you get to the airport late, traffic, etc.

Here's the gem.

As you are standing in the ticket line observe the ticket agents closely. Make sure you get an agent that smiles a lot. Ticket agents can do just about anything they want so you want to get a nice agent who wants to please - they smile!

Morale of the story and how this applies to support. If you can "smooze or stroke" the support person just a little you might be able to put a smile on their face and your chances of getting what you want will improve greatly.

If they do an outstanding job tell them you have one last request. You want to speak to their supervisor so you can tell them what a great job they did helping you and how impressed you are.

Support Call Details. Get the name of the tech, phone number, date and time of your call.

Write the details of the call down. We think we will remember, but we don't. Keep all the info for this specific problem together. When the problem has been resolved, note this & file it. You never know when you will need to refer to it again.

You must plan on the worst if things don't go your way. Later when you call again you need to prove you called, who you talked to and what they told you to do. This may make all the difference in a warranty replacement.

Here's the scenario. Something isn't working quite right but you and the tech can't make it fail when you call. I'll bet you've had that experience many times with your car!

After the warranty has expired (always happens to me) you figure out what the problem was. If you have a name, date and details of the support call they may still honor the warranty because you called and registered part of a known problem before the warranty expired.

The only reason I was able to prevail and get a replacement laptop was because I had a well documented history of every call I made to customer support. Keep a list of the case numbers.

Do Ask to Speak to a Supervisor. As a last resort you can ask to speak to a supervisor. DO NOT threaten to ask for a supervisor early in the call. That only makes a tech support person mad, defensive and threatened. Wait until the last minute before asking for the supervisor. You will destroy any rapport you have established by asking for a supervisor. Maybe you should

test the waters a bit by asking, “Do you think your supervisor might be able to help us?” Try to nurture the feeling of a “team work” and not two people at cross purposes.

Do Go Higher Up the Food Chain. Most corporations have a department that handles customer complaints and are not associated with the customer support department. This person or department may not be not easy to find. You may have to call the main corporate number and explain your dilemma to the operator. Tell them you do not want to be connected to support but connected to someone that handles support complaints.

Don'ts



Don't Start Off Being Angry.

You may not believe this - but this is your problem, not tech support. In most cases the problem will turn out to be something you did wrong. So unless you like eating humble pie, start off being reasonable and teachable. You can always get more pointed if things don't go your way.

One of my favorite statements that always works goes like this. After the tech says, “How can I help you?” Try this reply. “I'm really frustrated but I will try and be nice since I know that this is not your fault.” How could it be the tech's fault?

Don't Start by Threatening to Return the Product. They will not go out of business if you demand a refund. Some customer support techs would be more than happy to give you a refund just to get you off the phone. Realize that spending an hour with tech support pretty much eats all the profit the company made selling you a software product so they don't have much to lose if you demand a refund.

There are a few people that I have tried to help over the years I would have paid to go away! A refund would have been a relief and so much easier for me! I was just hoping they'd ask for a refund.

Don't Try to Mislead About What You Did!

Honesty will get you much better results. What happens when you lie to the speed cop? He's heard ALL the attempts to deceive him and delights in giving a tried and true response to embarrass you and gives you ticket anyway. u. Support is no different. We've heard all deceptive excuses and can spot a lie immediately.

Here's where it will really get embarrassing for you. Once you and support have figured out the problem you will both know what you did since the cause of the problem becomes obvious as part of the solution. Just be up front. Some techs really feel empowered trying to help you especially if you admit you messed something up. Try saying this. “I think I must of have done something that really messed things up, can you please help me.”

It's always better to plead ignorance than to lie. Many tech support people really do want to help you but you make their job much more difficult by trying to be evasive or to hide what you really did. Remember how your kids acted when they were trying to get away with a little fib? This is no different except you are the novice (kid) taking to support (mom or dad).

Don't Try to Tell Support How to Do Their Job. Start by answering their questions. Don't read the whole error message unless they ask.

This really drives me NUTS! Many times I know what the exact solution to your problem is within 15 seconds so you punish me by making me listen to something I don't need to hear and it wastes a lot of my time.

Remember, many support calls are like going to the doctor. He has already seen 15 cases of the flu that day and after three questions he knows exactly what medication he needs to give you so he doesn't need to hear your life history.

If the problem is a software bug, chances are good there is a download or a simple process you need to follow that the tech can walk you through or send you an e-mail with the process.

Don't Argue - Get a Different Tech. There are good techs and there are bad techs. There are smart techs and some new ones that read all their answers out of a manual or put you on hold while they ask their supervisor. There are even techs that can't speak understandable English.

OK - life is tuff so don't fight it. Make an excuse and politely hang up. Here's a couple of honest excuses that usually work for me.

"Thanks for your help but I'm out of time and I'll have to call back another time."

"Could you please spell that?" They will slow down and some WILL start to spell the words so you can understand them.

"Excuse me, I didn't follow - say again."

When you call back, chances are very good you will get a different tech. Hopefully they will be more knowledgable and can speak understandable English.

An Unbelievable Support Story

I purchased an expensive laptop that was certified by the manufacturer to run Windows Vista as soon as Vista was released.

A month ago I purchased Windows Vista. I called tech support and asked exactly what I needed to do and then installed Vista. What a disaster! Talk about shooting yourself in the foot! I also gave myself a hearing loss since my computer's sound card didn't work right.



I had several new problems I did not have when the laptop was running XP. The least of my problems was a computer clock that now lost time each day. Explain that one!

In the old days you could turn a little adjuster knob to speed up your watch. Those days are gone! My laptop had become a very expensive doorstop. It also embarrassed me in front of about 70 people when it failed during a professional demonstration of our software. So when I rightfully blamed the computer they probably thought it was really bad software.

I could not get the support I needed even though I had a well documented complaint history. I became blocked by the level one and level two tech support.



At one point in my support saga, I was even told I had voided my warranty by installing Vista. My response, "Excuse me? I previously followed what tech support told me to do - right to the letter." I was still rebuffed and told that I was at the end of the line of what they would do and they were NOT going to replace the computer - just reformat it back to XP. How wonderful! I could do that myself but that would not make Vista work.

I could feel my face getting red and for the first time in three weeks I was getting combative with the tech support guy. I decided that it



would not be professional to lose my temper so this had to be my final response. "Sir, we are at an impasse here. Your offer is totally unacceptable. I think we need to terminate this call." His arrogant response, "I told you that you will have to deal with me and if you go to someone else they will send you back to me and you know what my final offer is."

I could not believe my ears. Talk about a rude and controlling response from a level two tech. My response, "Sir, as I said, we are at an impasse. I'm terminating this call and I WILL be speaking to someone else at your corporation. Good-bye."

The next day I received an e-mail from this "tech" indicating that my support case had been closed. In other words, I'd been hung out to dry indefinitely!

So I called my other support "friend" at the corporate level again. Previously I had e-mailed him and told him that I felt so desperate that I was going to call the local TV station and talk with a guy who helps people who have legitimate complaints with companies and corporations. I also mentioned that the TV guy liked to call the six o'clock news so all can see how they respond. I knew this would be a PR disaster for this company if I pursued this option.

I was very careful not to appear threatening. I explained that I felt desperate with nowhere else to turn so I was asking if there was anything else he could do before I made my call to the investigative reporter at the TV station.

My new friend was very professional. He called me and we talked at length about my frustrations and how unfair I had been treated. He said that he had reviewed all my support case numbers and that I had a well documented support history.



He ended the conversation by saying that he would see if he could escalate the issue and he was recommending that I receive a new computer. That made me feel hopeful.



The Good News! The next day I received an e-mail stating that my support case had been magically reopened.

The Bad News. Unbelievably the e-mail stated that I needed to call the same level two tech that had refused to give me a replacement computer that would run Windows Vista as guaranteed.

I took a deep breath, counted to ten, tried to think positive thoughts and called thinking that maybe the tech had been humbled by corporate and was now willing to really help me resolve the problem with a new computer.

You guessed it! I got exactly the same totally inflexible answer. No deal and no new replacement computer. In other words, *bite the wheel!*

So it was yet another e-mail to my friend at corporate. I was very careful not to insult or offend him but to vent my frustration before calling the TV station I had mentioned previously. Again, I asked his advice before doing anything else.

I added a little more pointed detail to my complaint e-mail to him. It's always smart to keep a few things back so you can add a little more power to your argument as you go along. I said that I felt like I had read false and misleading advertising claims when I purchased the laptop since it didn't work as guaranteed (Run Vista). I then tried to use a little humor by stating that I wondered if the Vista Certification sticker on the laptop was just a fancy hood ornament that didn't mean anything.

I guess that did the trick or the company was just tired of dealing with the squeaky wheel -

me. We had both spent more time than the laptop was worth.

After I got word that I was going to get a new computer, I thanked my fiend in another e-mail and asked if he thought I might be able to get an additional "pain and suffering discount" to make me feel better about all the grief support had put me through.

Two weeks ago I received a new upgraded laptop model that works as guaranteed guaranteed. I got some added features such as a faster processor and extra gig of RAM.

Would I Do This Again? You bet! I love pain. Wasting my time while listening to elevator music is so relaxing and elevates my mode to new heights. The sound quality of the music is really enhanced by my cell phone. I find it very calming to watch the clock on the cell that reminds me that I'm also going to be charged for each second we spend on endless hold.

I like hearing several reminders of how important my call is to the company that puts me on hold for at least 15 minutes each time I call.

It makes me feel really important when they tell me that my call will be recorded for quality assurance. Sometimes I even talk to them while on hold hoping that someone is secretly listening, actually recording my call and making notes about what I'm muttering about.

Note: The above comments are just my brand of humor and the sarcastic comments are my way of coping.

I think they could make a lot more money if they ran psychological counseling or biofeedback ads instead of advertising about a company we aren't too happy with at the time of the call.

My personal all time favorite while I'm on hold. You call support and they waste your time telling you to use their internet support site. Don't

they understand that we've already spent hours in failure experiences searching their web site. Their site gives us really dumb FAQs like "How Do I Upgrade?"

Our call to support is a last resort. It's like rubbing salt in our wounds and wastes even more cell phone minutes telling us to use their web site.

It's really impressive to leave my name and number for a call back. The last time I did that they called three days later when I wasn't home. It really says that they don't want to talk to us!

What Would I Do / Recommend?

Buy the laptop at CompUSA, get the added warranty and take it back to the store (no two week waiting period and shipping to hassle with) flash a big toothy ultrabrite toothpaste smile.

Say, "Please Fix This as Guaranteed! Could I please have it back into two days or less?"



Whew!

That was painful. It was about like reliving a car wreck!

Hopefully you now know how to avoid this mine field or should I say WAR with bad customer support.



P.S. I was also forced to call Microsoft support and I spent another two hours with a very out-

standing tech who tried every tech trick known to man to make the laptop work with Vista.

Even though we couldn't cure my sick laptop, that experience dramatically changed my opinion of Microsoft support. I'd give them an A+++ and never hesitate to call them again.

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