

Customer Satisfaction

It is amazing what stores and businesses will do to keep you happy. If you have a bad experience, let the business know, request compensation. You'll be financially better off and feel better, too. That's because *asking* is psychologically healthier than just stewing about the injustice or simply complaining.

Remember -- if you don't ask, the answer is *always* no.

Honey works better than vinegar.

Venting anger makes people respond defensively. It's particularly ineffective when the person you're talking to wasn't responsible for the problem in the first place.

Try, "I wonder if you can help me." Turn the person into a friend who will assist you because your cause is just. Indicate that you're dissatisfied, but make it clear that you're reasonable.

Begin the process in person or by phone. Writing a letter should be your last resort.

Reason: Many people plan to send a letter but never get around to writing it. Calling is easier and more personal.

Specify the desired remedy.

When a clothing store forgot to remove the plastic antitheft device on a dress I purchased, I had to drive 20 minutes out of my way to bring it back. I asked to be compensated for my time -- and received a \$25 gift certificate.

When a national chain store kept a friend waiting two hours for the delivery of an appliance, he requested that the store pay his \$25 hourly wage for those two lost hours. Otherwise, he said, the deal was off and they could take the appliance back where it came from. He got his \$50.

Nothing is too outrageous to ask for.

Years ago, I bought a bank certificate of deposit (CD) that paid 5%. Soon afterward, the rate on similar CDs jumped to 6%. I wasn't very happy.

Such things happen all the time, of course, and most people take them in stride. I don't. I called my bank and asked them to raise the rate on my CD. They did.

When rates continued to rise, I called again. They raised my rate again.

Banks and other financial institutions can be especially accommodating when you request a better deal. If you're paying high interest on a credit card, call to request a lower rate.

Similarly, many credit card issuers are willing to waive their annual fees for good customers.

Don't take no for an answer.

If the first person you speak to turns you down, call back an hour later and talk with someone else. If you get two negative responses, ask for a supervisor. At that level, you're almost guaranteed to get the help you need.

You have more leverage with a national chain than with a single-store operation. One of the few times I did not get what I wanted was at a bed-and-breakfast near Boston. National chains

recognize that you'll have many future opportunities to use -- or avoid -- their services.
Examples...

A four-star hotel chain once stuck my husband and me in a room that was filled with dust. When I asked for help, they moved us to the executive floor at no extra charge. It was cleaner and nicer up there.

A rental agency once gave us a car whose ashtray was filled with cigarettes -- this after we had requested a non smoking vehicle! Because we were in a rush and had to take the car as it was, we suffered with the vehicle. To make things right, the agency took one day's charge, the extra gasoline charge and an additional \$100 off the bill. Instead of berating the woman at the desk for what the company had done to me, I had merely asked, "What can you do to compensate me for a bad experience?" I'm still a customer.

Ask... even when the rules aren't in your favor. Recently I bought chairs at a home-furnishings store, and they went on sale at 40% off a month later. I asked to have 40% taken off my bill -- and it was. Other examples...

I've had repairs done free of charge even though the warranty had expired.

I've received sale prices even when I've left the "required" coupon at home.

I've returned goods even though I could not locate my sales receipt.

I've learned that stores that don't advertise "we'll match any price," sometimes do. I wanted a pair of Birkenstock sandals and saw a great price at a store 40 minutes away. Well, it wasn't worth the drive. So, I told my local department store about the price -- and it matched the deal. Salespeople have much more discretion than many shoppers realize.

Whatever else happens, never be afraid to speak up.

You may think you're being a pain in the neck, but that's not the way many successful businesses see it.

Sometimes I've told the owner of a good restaurant that a certain dish was sub par. He has been glad to get the feedback and has usually refunded the cost of the item. And why not? Put yourself in his shoes. His nightmare is a customer who doesn't complain -- but never comes back.

Don't settle for the first offer.

A first offer is only that. Getting a \$15 gift certificate is nice, but \$25 is nicer.