



**Ten Minutes of Your Time. Lasting Business Impact.**

**Issue 13: 16 April 2004**

"Problems breed problems, and the lack of a disciplined method of openly attacking them breeds more problems."

**- Anonymous**

### **What's On My Mind This Week**

#### **Pass the Hassle**

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*CEO*

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Like some of you, I was on vacation last week. My family and I visited a large resort property near Walt Disney World in Florida, and during our stay I met several of the resort's managers and staff. Throughout the week, I was reminded it's the basics that cause most of the service issues, and the root causes of poor service are hard-wired into our current approach to serving customers.

Consider the following: My wife went down the hall to get a bucket of ice, but the ice machine wasn't working. She called the guest services department to inform them of the broken machine and learn where to get ice.

It's a simple issue, and the hotel could have responded a number of ways. Let's look at three possible responses and the impact each would have on the hotel and its guests.

#### **Option 1: "It's the Customer's Problem."**

The guest services person answers, apologizes and promises to find a working ice dispenser. She calls the room service manager and they determine my wife should go to the beverage dispenser in the hotel's mini-mart - a small store that sells drinks and snacks - for ice.

Stop here and track the hassle. The hotel promises working ice machines on each floor. The cost to the customer from the faulty ice machine includes the unnecessary trip to a broken machine, two calls with guest services, and the trip to the mini-mart for ice.

Who else is inconvenienced? Hotel employees must handle the guest issue. Mini-mart customers must wait or take warm drinks when the beverage dispenser runs out of ice due to additional demand. Mini-mart employees must also add ice to the beverage dispenser more frequently.

My wife is responsible to walk to the mini-mart for ice because hotel employees diagnosed the problem as 'customer needs to find ice'. In doing so, employees performed exactly as trained - handle guest issues cheerfully and expeditiously - and they directly addressed the guest's desire to find a source of ice. Many organizations would consider this flawless customer service and actively reward this approach.

Cheerfully and expeditiously are not the same as correctly, however. Once employees communicated a source of ice, they closed the issue. Other guests must now discover the broken ice machine on their own and find a source of ice. Each time my wife needs ice, she must go to the mini-mart. As a result, mini-mart customers and employees now have their own ice issues. The focus on addressing the symptom rather than fixing the root cause means customers will probably find the ice machine broken for quite some time.

**Option 2: "It's Room Service's Problem."**

Let's consider a different response: When my wife calls guest services, the woman apologizes, gets the room number, and instructs room service to bring ice to the room.

Again, track the hassle. The customer is still inconvenienced by the broken machine and the call to guest services, but this time the resolution transfers responsibility from the guest to the hotel.

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Who else is inconvenienced? Room service must take the call from guest services and bring ice to the room, but these actions eliminate the customer's hassle of not having ice. This also keeps the issue out of the mini-mart.

Why isn't this outcome routine? It requires room service to resolve an issue they did not cause. Since the ice machines are not room service's responsibility, it's much easier to direct the customer to a working ice machine.

The hotel becomes responsible when employees diagnose the problem as 'ice not available on guest's floor as promised'. They not only do this cheerfully and expeditiously, but work to eliminate the guest's inconvenience. This would be a customer-focused approach in many organizations, and be actively rewarded.

Still, the problem remains unsolved, because the issue is closed when ice is delivered to the room. The next ice-seeking guest faces the same hassles and starts the process again, but many questions remain unanswered: Will the staff send up ice, direct him to the mini-mart, or find some other option? What happens the next time my wife needs ice? Will she continue to 'bother' room service, or just look elsewhere for a working ice dispenser? If she calls room service, will they continue to come? Is my wife obligated to tip the delivery person?

At best, we have a continuing stream of hassled guests who call guest services and get ice delivered. At worst, guests and employees pursue a variety of options to get ice, creating a very uneven customer experience. The focus on making one guest satisfied has blinded the hotel from making every guest successful.

**Option 3: "We're Going to Solve the Problem."**

Here is what should have happened: The guest services employee apologizes and room service brings up the ice. Management is informed of the problem and a notice is posted on the machine - and

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in each guest room on the floor - stating the ice machine is out of order and, as a courtesy of the hotel, guests should call room service anytime they want ice delivered. Then the hotel promptly fixes the cause of the broken ice machine.

This perfectly eliminates hassle for customers, as the in-room note preempts trips to the broken ice machine. It takes the issue out of guest services, because customers call room service directly. It concentrates the pain in room service, where the burden of ice deliveries is felt daily and communicated to management. And it brings management's attention to the broken machine, so the root cause of breakage - in this case, lack of ventilation in the vending room that causes the ice and soda machines to overheat - is quickly determined and corrected.

Why isn't this approach used? Consider the burden it places on the hotel. Once notices are posted, people who wouldn't normally walk to get ice can take advantage of free ice delivery. Guests who would normally find another source of ice when confronted with a broken machine will now call room service. Might the burden of free ice deliveries impact room service's response time for paying food orders? Wouldn't it be easier to just respond if asked? Shouldn't room service have additional staffing until the machine is fixed, just in case? Faced with these objections, management makes a mental note to fix the machine but decides against posting the notices.

But concentrating the pain is crucial to solving the problem. Channeling all customer hassle through room service ensures the broken ice machine is correctly prioritized on management's agenda, and keeps the organization focused on doing what's necessary to end ice deliveries. It's easy to see the ventilation problem won't be addressed unless management gets serious about eliminating the root cause. The typical solution is to call maintenance to fix the machine - again, and again, and again. Leaving guests roaming the halls with ice buckets - day, after day, after day.

Likewise, activities that disburse the pain remove the urgency to fix

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the machine. When management is informed of the broken machine, they call maintenance and cross the issue off their list. In the course of resolving customer issues, employees are trained to disburse, deflect, and minimize the hassle to both the customer and the organization, but they are not trained to eliminate the root cause. Because many of today's best customer service practices focus solely on eliminating pain quickly, the current approach to customer service must change before the customer experience will improve.

Our best employees are working harder than ever to solve customer issues - and they're working harder than necessary. When we actively manage our own hassle rather than that of the customer, our problems begin to multiply. As a result, all of us - customers and employees alike - are going through life more beaten and bruised than necessary.

I know. After room service brought the first bucket of ice, I discovered a closer ice machine behind the hotel's bar. The bartender has been giving me - and other guests - ice for the past three days.

### **Take Ten Minutes**

Consider your current service approach and answer the following questions:

- How would your best people handle the broken ice machine?
- How would your newest employee handle it?
- Think of a recent customer issue. In the process of resolving that issue, what additional work was created in your company? Was that work performed by the customer or by your employees?
- What changes in your organization are necessary to shift the focus from resolving customer complaints to eliminating root causes?

### **Take the Next Step...**

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**in Orlando, Florida.** Alternatively, PCA can conduct a dedicated college for your organization, either at your facility or at a designated location near you.

For additional information, please call 800-722-1464 or [email us](#).

**About Take Ten Minutes**

*Take Ten Minutes* is a weekly publication of [Philip Crosby Associates](#) and [The Capability Group](#).

The premise behind *Take Ten Minutes* is simple: take ten minutes out of every week to refocus and recommit to business improvement. *Take Ten Minutes* features quotes and interviews to inspire you. We also pull articles from today's headlines as examples of the power of the preventive culture (or the deep problems caused by not having one).

As the name suggests, *Take Ten Minutes* is relentless with the editing razor and keeps each issue tight - each issue should take you no more than ten minutes to read, start to finish. You'll reap even bigger rewards if you kick in an extra ten minutes to discuss the ideas with a colleague or to take an idea found here and plan to roll it out in your organization. We hope *Take Ten Minutes* becomes the business improvement equivalent of your running partner, providing the inspiration you need to lace up and "just do it" on those weeks when the couch seems oh-so preferable.

We hope you enjoy *Take Ten Minutes*. As Philip Crosby said, improving your business "is a journey that never ends." So let the journey...*continue!*

Please send story ideas or comments to our [editor](#).

**About Our Companies**

In today's marketplace, only capable companies will survive and thrive. The overarching goal of [Philip Crosby Associates](#) (PCA) and [The Capability Group](#) (TCG) is to give companies the culture, tools, methodology and results-focused support to become 'Capable Organizations' - useful, reliable, adaptable, and ever-focused on achieving customer success.

PCA and TCG deliver on this goal by first working with clients to assess where they are on the maturity spectrum and where they want to go. For companies early in the process, we work hand-in-hand with management to install a culture of prevention - the culture that has been championed by the PCA side of our business since quality management guru and PCA founder Philip Crosby published *Quality is Free* in 1979. Over the past two decades, Crosby's techniques have been implemented by many of the Fortune 500, as well as small and mid-sized companies seeking excellence.

Once the foundation of the Capable Organization is present, TCG steps in to help clients take their efforts to the next level by further reducing costs, enhancing quality and promoting growth. TCG was founded by Kevin Weiss, who was a Quality Leader and Master Black Belt for General Electric when that company first implemented Six Sigma - a program CEO Jack Welch has

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attributed with "changing the DNA of GE". With a proprietary Cost-Quality-Growth™ Model created based on the knowledge that GE's success was due to much more than a typical Six Sigma deployment, TCG has helped shape Cost-Quality-Growth™ Programs for companies such as Shimano, American Express and Sony.

Along the journey to the Capable Organization, PCA and TCG provide a comprehensive set of training programs and materials as well as consulting and assessment services to accelerate progress. Products and services range from courses and CDs geared towards the education of hourly workers to intensive seminars for managers and executive teams.

For more information, email Chris Johansen of Philip Crosby Associates and The Capability Group [chris.johansen@capabilitygroup.com](mailto:chris.johansen@capabilitygroup.com), or call 617-716-0214.

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