

This is a true story that happened to a friend of mine, although the names are being withheld. She has given me her permission to re-tell the story of her recent trip to a local salon. She went there wanting just an updated coloring of a nice head of hair. Her appointment was scheduled for 5:30 and from what I heard, the entire appointment was supposed to last no longer than 2 hours. After a couple of hours, my friend thought she heard the stylist say "oops".

The coloring didn't turn out exactly how anyone had planned. Instead of turning her hair just a shade darker, her hair turned a slightly more colorful shade of orange, was not the color she was looking for. The stylist decided to try again, this time with a slightly different product. During the next hour and forty-five minutes she semi-apologized to my friend saying that she didn't know what happened and that this has only happened one other time.

Knowing that only one other person's hair had been colored orange unintentionally was not a source of comfort. At this point in the story, I became slightly confused. Primarily because I do not spend any time in a hair salon and have never had my hair artificially or chemically colored. My friend told of her head lying in a sink for an unhealthy length of time and tin foil wraps being applied to her hair. I can only assume that both were not being done at the same time.

After almost four hours at the salon, the stylist was clearly shaken and my friend's hair was still orange, but now had tinges of green at the ends. The stylist told/asked my friend to come back in the morning, when her manager would be in and she could fix the problem. My friend called her boss and explained that she would have to miss work in the morning because of the hair problem. My friend has a job that deals with the public and orange/green hair would not project the proper image requested by her employer. With tears in her eyes, she went home to her husband.

The next day my friend went back to the salon and the manager spent several hours fixing the mistakes of the previous day. The manager did have to cut approximately 4" of length because the hair at those points was too badly damaged. In the end my friend got charged \$35 for a haircut, but did not have to pay for any of the coloring. I was amazed! After all the wasted time and a half day off of work, the salon actually had the nerve to charge anything?

As small business owners and managers the people that work in our companies, including us, are going to make mistakes. Talk to most sales gurus and they will tell you that a mistake is the perfect time to create a customer for a lifetime, if you do it properly. First and foremost you must offer a heartfelt, sincere and face to face apology. Secondly you have to offer a settlement to the customer that is commensurate with the scale of the problem. In my friend's case, I would have not only given the coloring for free, I would not have charged for the haircut, and probably would have stocked her shelves with an ample supply of quality hair product.

But they didn't, and instead of creating a customer for life, they lost a customer and now my friend is telling her story to just about anyone who will listen. If you ask her the name of the salon, she will reluctantly tell you, exacerbating the image problem for the salon. The good news is that my friend's hair is mostly back to normal. And she is looking for a new salon.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.