

I love writing about customer service. Stories of great service, and stories where the service didn't quite make the grade. This is a story of questionable customer service. One of the great ladies I get to work with told me this story about her wedding ring. She was talking with a friend one weekend night and while she was talking the diamond in her ring came out of the setting and bounced off of the friend. She wasn't aware that it had happened and was very lucky that they were able to find it on the ground.

Before I get too far into the story, I need to fill you in with a little background. The ring was only 2 years old, they bought insurance through the store to cover such tragedies, and she was religious about taking it back for regular cleanings and inspections. As a matter of fact, just as recent as March, the store kept it for 2 weeks while they inspected and maintained her symbol of marriage.

On Monday she took the ring back to a store of the major chain at Valley West Mall where she originally bought it, and asked that the ring be fixed prior to her vacation trip, 8 days away. The person at the counter said they couldn't help her because the normal turnaround time was 2 weeks. Nobody else working that day could give her a better answer. Someone who could maybe help would be in on Wednesday. Two days later, over her lunch hour she drove from Ankeny back to the mall.

The next person to try and help told her that they would see what they could do, but couldn't promise anything definite. They also promised to call later that day, but did not. Back to the mall again on Thursday on her lunch hour. The manager on duty told her that he "had to forfeit his lunch hour" but the ring could be fixed before the vacation trip. Later we found out that the manager had not actually done the work himself, but sent an associate to the local repair shop. No mention of the 3 lunch hours my work mate spent dealing with this issue.

My work mate showed extreme patience and was much more diplomatic getting the run around than I would have been. She kept her eye on the ultimate goal of getting her ring fixed before she went on vacation, foregoing the horrible customer service experience involving store employees who put their wants in front of a customer's needs.

When the ring was finally repaired, my work mate expressed interest in buying another piece of jewelry, an alternative for when her wedding ring was in the shop being maintained. She thought that the manager would be more than willing to offer a great deal, considering all the time and trouble she had just experienced. She was wrong. The jewelry store did not take advantage of the incredible opportunity to turn an unhappy customer into a lifelong fan.

At the end of the transaction, the manager promised to have his district manager call and try to help straighten things out. She is still waiting for that phone call. In the meantime she went shopping at a local jewelry store here in Ankeny and was treated very, very well. She will continue to shop locally and tell the story of the horrible customer service at the store in the mall.

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