



BUSINESS OWNERS: KEEP THIS CRISIS CONTROL SUMMARY IN YOUR FILES: LESSONS FROM UNITED AIRLINES

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SanDiegoBizLaw.com
Contact: Amanda Berkshire
San Diego: (619) 793-4827
Email: ab@Worldwide-Press.com

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Los Angeles, CA. United Airlines has scared potential passengers and created a multi-layered lesson on what not to do in a crisis situation so it doesn't become a PR crisis. Keep this information handy. Every company has a crisis from time to time; here's what you need to know and share with your executive team. A single PR crisis can put your company out of business, or, at the very least, get you and your team replaced.

1. TRY TO RESOLVE IT WITH SOMETHING THAT COMES EASILY TO YOU, BUT YOUR CUSTOMER VALUES.

Whatever business you are in, you get your goods or services wholesale (free flights, even on a standby basis). Try to resolve the problem by offering something that has a high perceived value but is not so dear to you that it creates a large loss. The customer is 'not' always right, but the customer can write something about you on Yelp and, as it hurts you more to respond, they will 'seem' right to the public, who will only read one side of it all.

2. AVOID CALLING THE POLICE (of any kind) FOR A NON-CRIMINAL INCIDENT.

Once you try to make the police force your own, and they step in with people who are trained to control others, you will have alienated your client past the point of no return. Worse yet, if the person flails and touches a police officer, he or she now gets a criminal record thanks to you and believe me, you will pay dearly for that. As stupid goes, this is the most stupid move a company can use against a client when the company is not at threat. A disagreement is never resolved when one party is fully armed and the other is under threat.

3. SHOW THEM WHO THE MANAGEMENT REALLY IS, AND DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION FOR THE SITUATION.

If your story makes it to social media, the first response from the CEO should be an instant public apology. The public needs to think of him or her as a nice, warm, empathetic individual who just had the bad luck of hiring someone who had no common sense. Mistakes happen. The public forgives you. If, on the other hand the CEO makes a bad impression or supports his or her staff, regardless of their stupidity, then people will fear the company and avoid it all costs. Do you understand?

4. DO NOT ANGER A CUSTOMER AND THEN ACCUSE HIM OR HER WITH BEING BELLIGERENT.

This is a common tactic used by the police to arrest persons. Lawyers use it at trial all the time. You say something inflammatory, the person reacts, and you try to show the jury how unreasonable they are. This is dangerous behavior. Unless you have the powers of arrest, you shouldn't do something to further anger your customer. If you have an angry customer, you should do everything you can to get them to a reasonable states. The easiest way to do so: Offer something up front, then dine or have drinks with him or her in a casual manner and work out the rest. Using this system you may create the most loyal customer (who refers you business) when you are finished. People understand errors occur: it's how you handle them.

5. IF YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING EMPATHETIC KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT.

A client/customer may upset you. They are in a heated state due to what happened. Don't get offended. Many of them don't even mean what they say in the heat of the moment. If you don't internalize the person's comments, start looking at the situation from their point of view. The easiest way to do it is not to think of them, but to think of one of your parents, your spouse, or your best friend having gone through this and how would you respond? Now do this with your client.

6. BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR WORDS AND POSITIONING OF YOUR FIRM.

It's easy to say and do what you want when you have a golden parachute. However, a corporation's reputation is largely based on the philosophies of the CEO when it comes to customer service. Remember the corporation took care of you and your family when you were looking for a career or opportunity. Now, it needs 'you'. Do everything with all the integrity the company deserves, even if you have to bite your lip in doing so.

7. MAKE CONTACT WITH THE AGGRIEVED PARTY ASAP.

Call the person, arrange a personal contact and work things out. Do not let it get to the media or to a lawyer's office. Let the person hear from you and know that you care. The difference it will make is phenomenal. It does not matter that you are on vacation when it takes place or may be sleeping. You are better off losing a night's sleep than months of sleep in the future while your and you company's reputation are in the balance. Don't only contact the party, make this up to them.

8. WORK IT OUT BEFORE IT BECOMES A LAWSUIT.

If a situation is so out of control that a lawyer has been hired or litigation is threatened, resolve it immediately. Negotiate and work out a settlement or understanding of some sort. Keep it confidential if you have to, or be generous and go public with it. This is especially the case if you are in the wrong. In today's world of Yelp and social media, one event can put a small company out of business.

Steven Riznyk is the CEO and senior litigator of [San Diego Biz Law](http://www.sandiegobizlaw.com), a crisis negotiator, and business strategist who is hired to analyze and resolve complex and crisis issues worldwide. He can be reached at 619-793- 4827.

Amanda Berkshire
Worldwide-Press
619-793-4827
email us here

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