



True tale of service misunderstandings

One of the great things about working with people, especially in a customer service situation, is the constant source of humor.

That's the attitude of the service professionals who shared their humorous or embarrassing moments with us. And remember, if you take your work seriously and yourself lightly, you'll go through each day with a smile on your face.

■ **Honesty is the best policy.** *A lesson learned the hard way helps Tony Gruber make an important point with new reps:*

When I started out on the phones at a major New York City bank's inbound phone center some 10 or so years ago, one of the first things we did was ask for the caller's name. We were coached to use it as appropriate during the call, and of course it was needed to record the call outcome in our CRM system. Well, on this particular call I did ask up front for the caller's name but was so intent on handling the issue raised, I forgot to use it and worse, as I approached the end of the call, realized that I needed it to record the call. Because I had asked for his name up front, I was embarrassed to ask him again. Thinking quickly, I decided to ask him to spell his last name. I thought it was a smooth way to get his name and not have to tip my hand that I didn't remember it. I was mortified as he spelled out "S - M - I - T - H" and said, "You completely forgot my name, didn't you!"

To this day, I will never forget who I am speaking with. But the really important lesson learned is to never try to outwit a caller as it could easily backfire. I use this example when working with new reps to highlight the importance of being honest with your caller. The right thing to do in that instance is apologize and re-ask the question!

■ **The perils of multitasking.** *Patti Dillon reveals how a CSR can show her callers just how much she loves her work:*

One particularly busy day, I was taking calls while multitasking by reading my email and catching up on paper-

work. The greeting we used for callers had long become second nature to me: "Thank you for calling. This is Patti. How may I help you?"

On this particular day, during the holiday season, there had been a lot of Secret Santa emails circulating in our department from people thanking their anonymous pals for gifts. Almost every one started out with: "Thank you for the gift ... I love it!"

After reading about 10 of these, I picked up the phone and answered a call with: "Thank you for calling. This is Patti. How may I love you today?"

The woman on the other end was speechless at first, and so was I. Finally, she said: "Thank you. I guess you really do appreciate my call!"

■ **Conquering the language barrier.** *Helen Trandem shares this story, which illustrates the perils when working with customers who are not primarily English speakers:*

One of our reps took a call from a customer who was using her father's credit card to place an order. The rep then needed to speak with the father to verify that his daughter had proper authorization to use the card. The customer's first name was Thai. When the gentleman got to the phone, the rep asked, "Are you Thai?" The customer, who spoke very little English, replied, "No, I Lao-tian." This went back and forth for a while as they tried to gain a better understanding of one another. It took several minutes to get the information that yes, indeed, his first name really was Thai, and that his daughter was authorized to use his card.

