



# Has Customer Service Been Forgotten?

BRANDON MEISNER, CFM

**W**orking in facility management offers the opportunity to interact with so many other professions. Facility managers support the business supporting the customers—who are, more than likely, everyone in the building or on the entire site. But what happens when the focus is too much on budgets, on schedules and on reacting to daily problems?

When distractions happen, facility managers often forget why they are in their chosen profession: to maintain a safe, pleasant and productive work environment and to support the goal of the company. That's not to say that managers need to focus less on budgets, schedules or unexpected problems. When the focus is on these other issues, one must also not forget the people behind the reason for the project.

Cost reductions and budget savings are a short-term fix that can risk undermining your service to tenants. Without these individuals to support, facility professionals wouldn't have a job. Has the customer been forgotten?

## The right skills

Facility and building managers have many skills: project management, engineering, design, etc., but how many have the proverbial strong people skills? This is what is often missing in the industry. As the profession grows, so will the competition on both a business and personal level. In order to stay competitive, the company and/or the facility department must have the skills to stay ahead. Facility managers must not only meet the needs of customers, but also exceed them.

In the world of an outsourced facility management company, one must remember that customers always have a choice to choose a different company to service their needs.

In an internal facility management organization, customers may not have a choice to change their provider. The facility manager is the agent representing the department and often representing the director, CFO or someone higher, which will have a direct impact on job advancement.

Dealing with customers is based upon attitude. It starts with recognizing that every situation is different and unique. When working with people, one is handling emotions. Depending on how the customer is approached, be it the first time or the fiftieth time, the last experience will immediately determine the service recipient's attitude for future contacts.



### Inhibitors of poor service

But why do customers get bad service in the first place? Of course there are those bad days at work when one would rather be at home on the sofa, but even on a day like that, it should not affect the level of customer service. The inhibitors of deficient service can be summarized as follows:

- **Inadequate core products** - Are you offering the services that your customer needs?
- **Unproductive procedures** - Do you have the right procedures in place? Are they unnecessary? Are they effective?
- **Insufficient resources** - Are you using the right tools to get the job done? Do you have the capabilities to meet the customer's needs?
- **Teamwork** - Do you have support from your team? From your management?

- **Insight** - Do you have the knowledge of what your customers need before they know they need it?
- **Customer knowledge** - Do you know what your customers expect from you?
- **Appropriate service culture** - Does your company have the commitment needed to compete in the customer service industry? Do you have the training and foresight to anticipate what the customer will need?

### How to give better service

Although there is more than one way to do things, there is a better way to do certain tasks. Many models exist demonstrating how to give good customer service. These models could be reiterated, but that is not an effective tool. The desire is to have a checklist of tactics that can assist the facility manager in assisting the customer.

The first step is to make the change. Many companies are over analytical and need to perform a survey, assess, analyze, make recommendations, etc. But sometimes the initial change begins with oneself. The facility manager needs to become more demanding of him/herself and begin to have the eyes of the customer. Another way to increase this sense of awareness is being a more demanding customer to one's own suppliers—a lesson on how to handle the demands that your customers are placing upon you.

### The HEART method

When customers need attention or are upset with a service they have received use a method called HEART.



**H**ear your customer's needs.

**E**mpathize with them and try to understand them.

**A**pologize for any inconvenience.

**R**eact to the problem.

**T**ake action to get the problem resolved and follow-up to make sure the task is complete.

The customer may not always be right but by using this method one can respond according to the customer's request.

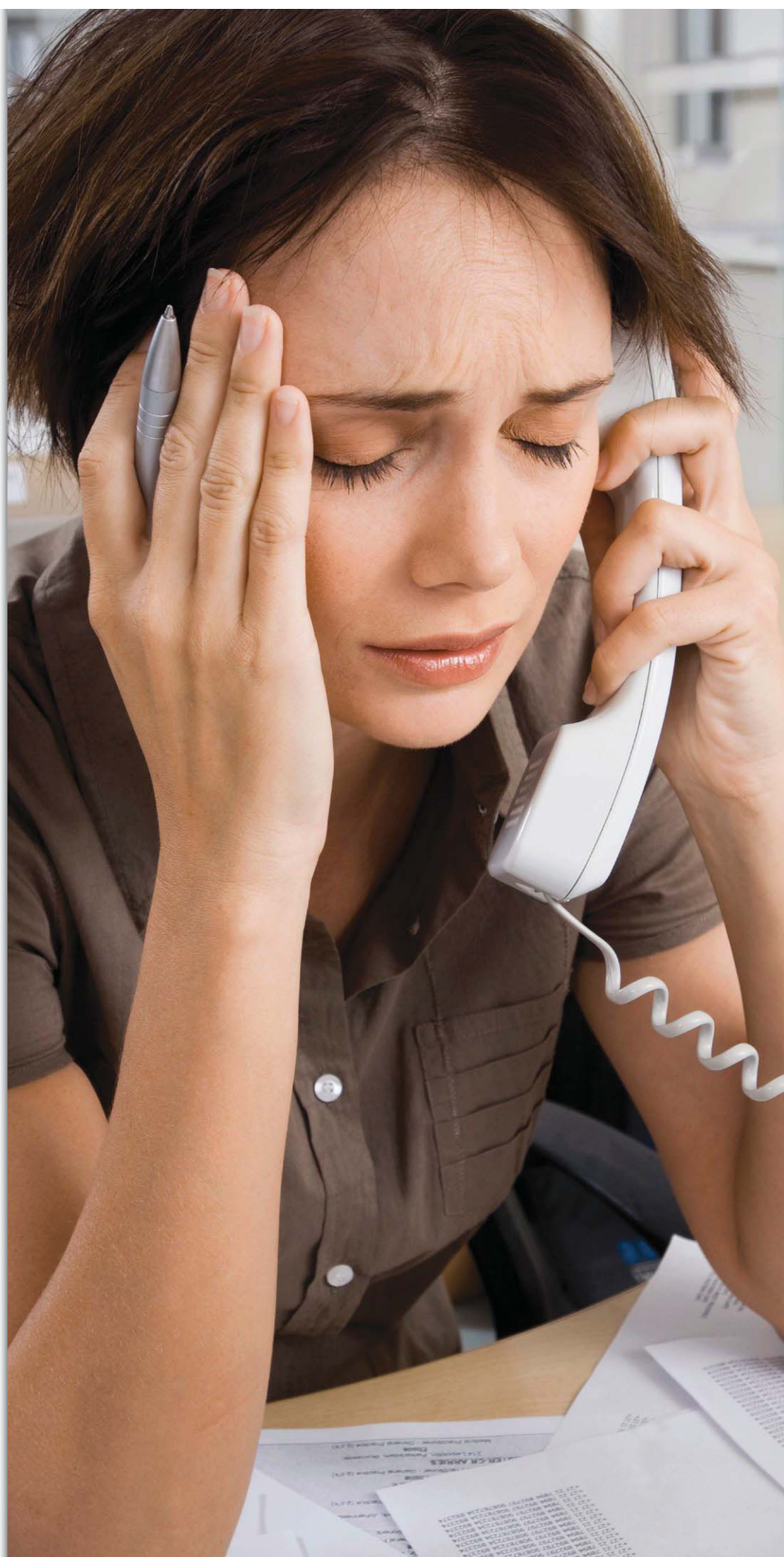
This change of thinking will inspire and motivate others to increase their customer service. Instilling the ethics of unsurpassed service needs to be supported by the entire team.

As prominent American industrialist Henry Ford once said, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

Secondly, as important as teams are, and as imperative it is to encourage a sense of responsibility for group performance, it is also vital for individuals to take ownership of their roles. Each employee should take personal responsibility for the service given to their customer—placing them at the center of the task. The focus should be on intimacy with the customer and customizing each experience based upon the situation. One must get away from the automatic, system-generated response that customers have found to be predictable. Amiable communication and body language all factor in as well. Being competent, courteous and personalizing the situation for each customer creates a unique experience that they will acknowledge and respect.

Thirdly, being accessible to the customer is another important factor. If the customer has a need, he/she expects a prompt response. Response times should be established in the company's procedures or charter. This ensures that it is providing quality services and documenting the process from which to benchmark—showing that dependability and accuracy are designed into the system.

Customers do not want any surprises, unless it deals with extra positive effort on the company's part. Make your organization easy to deal with, and eliminate rigid policies



that do not let the employees satisfy the customer. Nobody likes hearing, "those are the rules and there is nothing I can do about it."

### Staying one step ahead

After establishing what the service model entails, the company will be able to manage the expectations of the customers more effectively and follow through with a common service language within the facility management team. This will assist in avoiding misunderstandings, contract conflicts or having the need to establish a recovery plan after a failed service.

By pre-establishing the boundaries of the customer's service, the company will also know how to surpass the customer's expectations. Doing this will build long-term loyalty to the outsourced facility management firm and avoid any service recovery plan.

As an in-house facility management depart-

ment, surpassing customer service expectations often makes tasks easier in the long run. Foreseeing what the customer might need and getting it to them before they ask for it is ideal. This is done by always staying one step ahead of the customer's needs.

Finally, there is a need to keep an ongoing review of services and performance, and benchmark them against industry standards. As a result, the facility manager will know where improvements need to be made—with products, procedures, or even the service culture—with a team of leaders. This will serve as the building blocks used to create an exemplary business.

Facility professionals cannot forget their mission: to maintain a safe, pleasant and productive work environment and to support company's goal. Within that environment is the customer. One must always remember that service truly matters—often

making or breaking customer loyalty to your company. **FMJ**

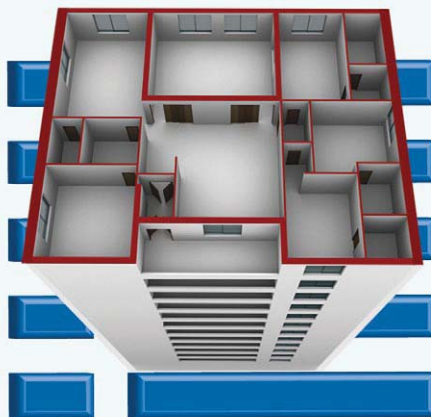


Brandon Meisner, CFM, has more than 15 years of experience in facility management, commercial design and project management. He works in facilities at a major defense contractor in the metro Washington, D.C., area.

Meisner has published many writings focusing on how facility managers deal with cultural diversity in their work environment and the integration of multi-generations in the workplace.

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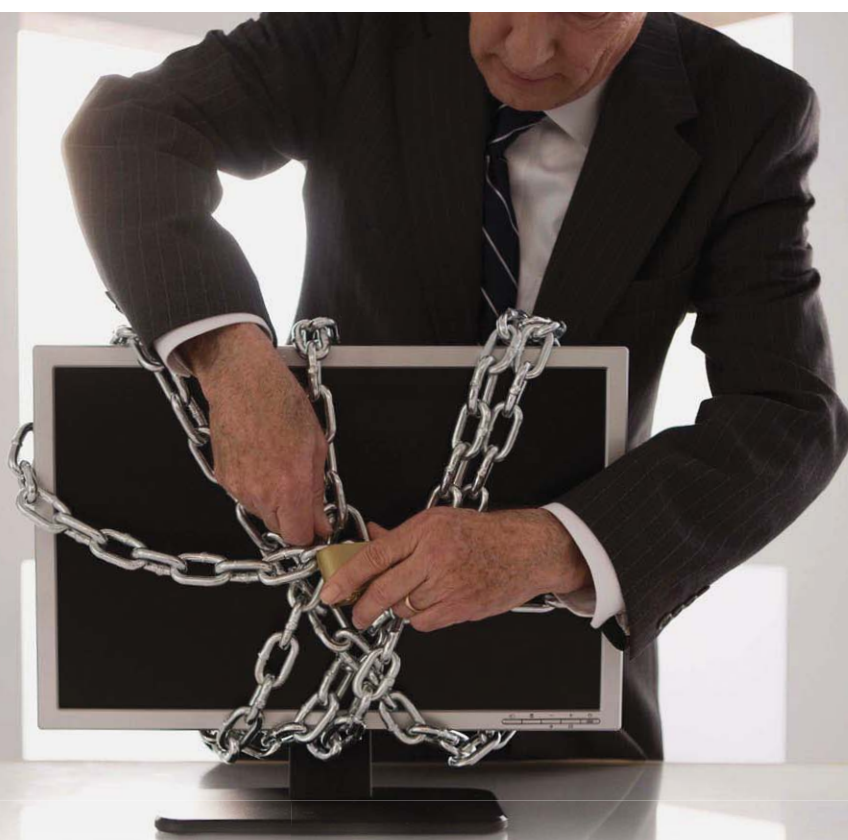
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# Safe and Responsible Hard-drive Destruction

ANDREW KELLEHER

It's no secret that most computers contain information the owners would rather keep secret. But there is a lot of bad advice out there about how to destroy used hard drives.

Businesses that have to deal with liability, workplace safety, and the disposal of multiple hard drives will have a problem with poor destruction methods that tend to be difficult, impractical and less than 100 percent effective.

Successful hard drive destruction is best accomplished with proven equipment that is safe, easy to use and reliable—providing the assurance that no one is going to recapture a bit of data off discarded drives.

This is not as paranoid a view as it used to be. Data recovery technology continues to advance by leaps and bounds, and there are many techniques for recovering information from seriously damaged drives. The U.S. National Security Agency has developed guidelines that require hard drives used by

U.S. federal government agencies or their contractors to be degaussed and physically damaged prior to disposal.

## Better safe than sorry

Every enterprise needs to be vigilant about the disposal process. There is a real risk of information (tax records, bank-account and credit-card numbers, etc.) falling into the nefarious hands of identity thieves. There is also the possibility of a lawsuit from an employee, customer, patient, or other individual harmed by the release of his/her private information. Hard drives can also contain information competitors would love to see, such as price lists, sales figures, customer data, engineering data, memos drafted in preparation for bidding, etc. The list goes on and on.

Computers must be replaced from time to time—more frequently as newer technology makes them obsolete. Although hospitals and other health care and health insurance providers, banks and other financial institutions, and government/military

entities are subject to codified standards of confidentiality, every business has employee records and proprietary information.

But different facilities have different security needs, and that is why there are different kinds of safe and effective hard-drive-destruction equipment on the market.

## Implementing an information security program

Just one hard drive can contain hundreds of thousands of files. When a digital file is deleted from a computer, the information actually remains on the drive, as do deleted email messages and records of all online activity.

To minimize the chances that this data can be recovered, many businesses take a “belt and suspenders” approach—using two proven methods of data destruction. But there is more to information security than choosing the right destruction equipment. How old drives are handled prior to destruction is just as important. They