

# SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY  
CREAMER

SAW  
DOCTOR



## Customer Service

When we hear the term “customer service,” most of us think about the retail trade. But we all have customers and we all should be using good customer service techniques. This applies to loggers, sawmillers, and even cantankerous old saw doctors. And given today’s economy, the need for good customer service has never been greater than it is right now.

The first maxim that comes to mind when you think of customer service is “the customer is always right.” To me, that mantra is right up there with “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

While it is true that in most cases the customer may have the final say, that doesn’t mean the customer is always right. There are a lot of times when the customer is uninformed and may not understand the issues. How could anyone always be right under those circumstances?

As business people who deal with customers, I think it is our responsibility to educate and inform our customers so that they are in the position to make a well informed decision and to better understand what it is that you are trying to do for them.

Of course a lot of our dealings are business to business instead of retail. One of the major differences is that retail customers don’t often recognize your need to make a profit on all transactions. When you are dealing with other businesses, you should both recognize that a good deal is only a good deal when it is a good deal for both of you. Fortunately when dealing with other businesses, it is common that both of you are well aware of each other’s need to make a profit.

Regardless of whether you are dealing with another business or a retail customer, perception is nine tenths of the law. It is always important for you to give your customer a good deal. But all of the good deals in the world won’t get you much if the customer isn’t aware that they got a good deal. And in many cases, if you want your customer to be aware that they just got a great deal, you might have to do some serious communicating, informing, and educating to be sure that your

customer can fully appreciate what you just did to be able to give them a good deal. Of course, “good deal” is a relative term and it will mean different things to different customers. And I don’t mean that you should imply that you did them a big favor. You didn’t do anyone a favor. You just did your job which happens to be making sure that all deals are fair and good for you and the customer at the same time.

If the deal isn’t profitable for your customer you can’t expect to keep them as a customer for very long. And by the same token if the deal wasn’t profitable enough for you, the customer can’t expect you to still be in business when they next need your products or services.

If you truly are fair in your business dealings, than the more your customer understands about what you are doing the better that customer can realize that they are benefiting from your fair dealings with them.

It’s all a matter of perception and they won’t get the right impression until you have done the rest of your job which happens to be to communicate properly with your customer so that they completely understand what is going on.

No matter how fairly you deal with everyone it is inevitable that there will be a complaint. It would have been better if you had educated your customer enough that no complaint emerged, but now that it is here, you have an excellent opportunity to either lose a customer or retain them.

We are all capable of making mistakes and the first thing you should do when handling a customer complaint is to readily acknowledge that you are aware that you are capable of making a mistake and are readily willing to accept responsibility for that mistake if indeed it was your mistake. This is no time to start getting defensive or to let your ego get in the way. You have to make it perfectly clear that your priority is to resolve the problem fairly regardless of whether it is your mistake or your customer’s.

As a saw doctor there are many situations where a customer will have a problem with a saw that you just hammered and

the big question is whether there is something wrong with the mill, or with how you hammered the saw.

The first thing that I do is to acknowledge that I could have made a mistake and make it very clear to the customer that my top priority is to find the cause of their problem so that it can be corrected. And actually there are times when in my effort to get at the problem in an unbiased way, I am hoping that the problem is that I made a mistake on their saw. Because I can easily correct that problem at no cost to the customer and then the problem is resolved. Everybody is instantly happy. If, however, I find that the problem is somewhere in their mill, it then gets more complicated and can become a drawn out process of typical data gathering. And then I have to rely on the customer to fix the problem properly to get the desired results before the saw needs to be rehammered as a result of running on a deficient mill. You can easily see where it is possible for the customer to get impatient and decide that there is something wrong with the way the saw was hammered to begin with and that maybe you just don't want to admit it. Again, perception is nine tenths of the law.

I have seen cases where someone hammers a saw for a mill and it won't run properly. So they take the saw back and either the anvilman just rehammers the saw regardless of what the saw looks like and now nothing has really changed, or the anvilman inspects the saw and pronounces it okay and declares that the problem must be in the mill. In my mind it isn't good enough to just say the problem has to be in the mill.

Every problem in the saw or the mill should be detectable and discernable. If I inspect the saw and declare that it is indeed within a running tolerance, then it becomes my responsibility to find out exactly what is causing the trouble. Whether that involves a visit to the mill for a standard troubleshooting session, or whether it can be done over the phone by analyzing requested data gathered by the mill manager, it needs to be done. Either way, we have to resolve the problem. The key is to not get defensive about where the mistake is and to honestly look for the mistake in all places with as little bias as possible.

One more thing in the world of good customer service: Yes, you often need to educate your customers about what you do so that they can better appreciate what is happening. But the mere fact that your customers don't know as much as you about what you do, doesn't mean they are stupid. They need to be educated, but they also need to be respected and, of course, appreciated. And you have to make sure they know that you respect and appreciate them because perception is nine tenths of the law.

**Questions about sawmills and their operation should be sent to Forum, The Northern Logger, P.O. Box 69, Old Forge, NY 13420, FAX #315-369-3736.**

*The author is a saw doctor and president of Seneca Saw Works, Inc., P.O. Box 681, Burdett, NY 14818, tel. (607) 546-5887, email casey@senecasaw.com.*

Serving the  
Forest Industry  
for Over  
**30**  
Years



**Tigercat**  
635D SKIDDER



**TimberPro**  
TF830 FORWARDER



**430**  
FELLER BUNCHER  
**Valmet**  
Komatsu Forest



**337 CHIPPER**  
**TEREX WOODSMAN**

**Now From Four Convenient Locations:**  
Boonville, NY (Main Offices)  
Little Valley, NY • Allenwood, PA  
Wheelock, VT

**SALES & SERVICE OF:**  
BWS & Pitts Trailers  
CSI Delimber & Slasher  
Hood Log Loaders & Slashers  
Log Max  
Quadco Saw Heads  
Risley Processing Heads  
Robotec Grapples  
Tigercat  
TimberPro  
Timberwolf  
Valmet Komatsu Forest  
Terex-Woodmans Chippers

**MON-FRI: 8AM-5PM SAT: 8AM-NOON**

**1-800-541-4214** 8730 INDUSTRIAL PARK  
BOONVILLE - NY  
WWW.CJLOGEQUIP.COM

# IRONMART

## Used Recycling & Forestry Equipment



**2007**  
**Cat 563**  
**SH56 sawhead**  
**\$115,000**

(7) 02-09 Cat 525/535 B's & C's S/A & D/A	\$40-109,000
(3) 06-08 Cat 545C CCR 131"	\$125-165,000
01 Cat 322 shovel loaders	\$109,500
03 Cat D5	\$57,000
97-08 Prentice 2570, 470, 511EX, 670, 611	\$34,900-128,500
(4) Prentice 280, 2384 and 410 loaders	\$24,800-212,000
(3) 05/08 Doppstadt SM720's	\$200-245,000
(2) 02/08 Doppstadt 3060K/3080K/AK530	\$325-485,000
(4) 04-06 Peterson 4700B/4710B, 6700B, 6710	\$199-450,000
(2) 04-05 Peterson 4800E's	\$100-199,000

# IronMart.com

# 888.561.1115