

Doug Ringer

How to Ruin Customer Relations in 3 Easy Steps

Read this if you want to learn 3 business relationship killers and what you should do instead. I have compiled three steps based on my observations and experiences as an engineering, product, and marketing manager.

One, unilaterally change the parameters of the relationship or agreement - This trait is a key relationship killer since it is a direct violation of the written contract and typically any number of verbal agreements. In legal terms, this is a breach of contract. In the non-legal world, it ranges from a violation of basic trust to an outright lie. While verbal agreements are meaningless in court, they are what bind together members of society.

There can be many reasons for this change, some intentional and some due to thoughtlessness. The results are similar.

Here are some of the ways I have seen this manifested:

1. technical - the product or service does not perform as advertised or promised
2. financial - the cost of the product is increased without discussion or notice
3. schedule - the promised delivery date is missed by weeks/months/years
4. lack of character - you were lied to, plain and simple

Two, provide much less value than promised - Financial decisions, are based on value. Is the value to be received at least as much as what is being paid for it?

The following is a list of events that frustrate customers and cause them to take their business to your competitors:

1. product does not work as promised
2. delays in delivery

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3. you cannot explain how the product works to your customers

Remember, there are few items that are truly sole-sourced. Your customers have options. If you cannot or will not meet their needs, your competitors will.

Three, don't communicate - In this era of instant communication, there is no good excuse for failing to communicate with anyone. Poor professional skills are a common cause for poor communications and can be improved through coaching. Other common causes are lack of proper priorities and uncaring employees that will return calls when convenient for them.

Some common examples I've experienced are shown below. Each of these are amazingly simple to correct.

1. delayed response to phone calls - correct this by checking your calls at least daily
2. voicemail is full - see #1 above. This tells everyone who calls that you don't value any of your customers
3. no response to e-mails and phone calls for days or even weeks - Not much option here but to go to the perpetrator's superior, schedule a face-to-face meeting, or find another point of contact

It is relatively simple to make it into the top 20% of suppliers in both B2B and B2C businesses. It only requires a quality product or service and treating your customers fairly and with professional respect.

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[Doug Ringer](http://www.dougringer.com) currently manages IP cameras for Schneider Electric in their video surveillance business. Doug has held global roles in marketing, manufacturing and R&D at General Electric, Ericsson, Honeywell, Meritor and in a small private firm. He also served on the board of directors and president of the board of a civil rights organization based in Kentucky. Doug lives with his family in Fort Collins, Colorado. Follow him at <http://www.dougringer.com>.