

Customer Experience Insight

“4 ways mistakes can actually build loyalty”

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Mistakes can be stumbling blocks – unless you turn them into building blocks for customer loyalty. Here’s how one customer service giant does it.

To keep customers happy when mistakes happen at Southwest Airlines, Fred Taylor, Senior Manager of Proactive Customer Service Communication, and his team:

1. **Don’t pretend to be perfect.** Southwest isn’t always responsible for mistakes (they can’t prevent snow storms!) But in any event, frontline service pros and management acknowledge that something went wrong for customers. In fact, a team reviews daily the flights that were delayed the prior day. Then they send apologies – and sometimes even discounts – to customers who were affected.
2. **Take responsibility and apologize.** If customers complain to anyone – a phone rep, flight attendant, gate attendant, pilot, etc. – that person runs with the issue, doing whatever needs to be done to make it right. The employee might say, “I’m sorry this happened. I’ll take care of it.” Because Southwest doesn’t set rules on how to make customers happy, employees use good judgment to fix issues.
3. **Find a reasonable fix.** After the “I’m sorry,” (a top priority because customers need their emotions acknowledged), employees quickly fix it and ask if customers agree to the solution.
4. **Uncover what went wrong.** Teams of service pros regularly look closer at what went wrong, Taylor explained recently at the International Customer Service Association’s annual meeting. They consider if they failed to follow common sense, stuck too close to a process or failed to prepare. Then they make fixes to processes and plans to avoid similar issues.