

SORRY, OUR POLICY  
DOESN'T PERMIT IT:

# ONE QUICK WAY TO KILL CUSTOMER TRUST

BY **BARBARA KIMMEL**, Executive Director of  
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It's not an uncommon story. In fact, we hear variations of it every day. The names change, but the theme remains the same, and so do the bad actors.



Last week I headed over to the closest home improvement store think Home Depot or Lowe's. First stop was the door and window department. I needed to order a few window screens and brought the old ones with me to ensure the right purchase. Upon completion of the \$70.00 order, I politely asked the employee to discard the old screens. And then I heard one of my favorite lines "Sorry our policy doesn't permit it." The employee turned his back and walked away.

**W**e proceeded to finish shopping. I carried the screens (one was 6 feet long) while my son flat bedded 8 bags of mulch, and then off to the checkout where I asked the checker whether there was a suggestion box in the store.

"Suggestions? You must make them online.

The instructions are on the back of the receipt." She never asked if she could help me and apparently had no interest in hearing my story, but I told her anyway. Her response "Customers always try to hand off all sorts of trash to store employees." According to the checker, if the store took the garbage that all the (evil) customers brought in the door, they would have to raise their prices.

She then completed the transaction, handed me the paperwork for the screens I had ordered, along with a separate sales receipt and commented that she would be happy to attach them, but the store did not provide staplers at checkout ... something about a policy.

Moral of the story: I have no loyalty to this store, and next time I'll shop at the competitor. It's that simple. Just a few years ago, a consumer faced with a customer service issue had only a few avenues of recourse—a letter, a phone call or a glass of wine. Now the customer has an additional opportunity to report their story on social media, "outing" the offender, should they choose to do so.

All companies have policies, and your hands may be tied when it comes to those policies. Still, how you, as a sales professional, notify—or don't notify—customers of those policies can cause customers to lose face in you and the organization.

What can we learn from stories like the one I experienced? How can we earn the trust of our customers? I turned to some of Trust Across America's [Alliance members](#) for advice and input:

First, [Charles H. Green](#), author of Trust Based Selling, offered some prime tools for translating both trustworthiness and a propensity to trust:

1. An ability to listen empathetically or listening with respect, not just to gain information.
2. A relentless focus on the relationship, not the transaction.
3. Viewing every transaction in the context of the longer term.
4. The basic emotional intelligence skills—knowing and speaking about the feelings of oneself and of others.

As sales professionals, we must remember that good customer service is everyone's job. It's an important component in building trust. But how do we put that into practice in a way that makes the most sense and produces the results we seek?



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Bruce Anderson, the Chief Ethics Officer at [Health Net, Inc.](#) in Los Angeles offers this “An attitude of helpfulness coupled with competent advice is what most customers are looking for. As most people in service industries genuinely like to help others, a sincere desire to listen and be helpful while explaining your organization’s policies and procedures will get you most of the way home with even irate customers.”

[Dennis Reina](#) has some great advice: “Good customer service is like trust. Trust is everyone’s responsibility, and trust begins with you. Good customer service also begins with you. Good customer service starts with each individual doing their part to make a contribution to the whole customer experience to meet and exceed the customer’s expectations.”

[Laura Rittenhouse](#) reminds us “If customers are treated well—and listened to—it’s a sign that employees are treated well, which in turn is a sign that management is looking out beyond their own self-interest. Try this test—next time you fly a plane—look up the name of the company’s CEO and ask the flight attendants when you board how Mr. or Ms. X is doing. If they speak favorably of the CEO, expect great service. If they don’t, get ready for reactive not proactive service, complaints about management and cold coffee.”

Reaching out to the same group, I asked them, rather than “Sorry, this is our policy” what might have been a more customer-focused response in this situation? These were their responses:

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Says [Robert Galford](#), “While one always has to find the words that work for them, try something like “I’ve tried to find a way around this for you, but I just haven’t been able to do that.”

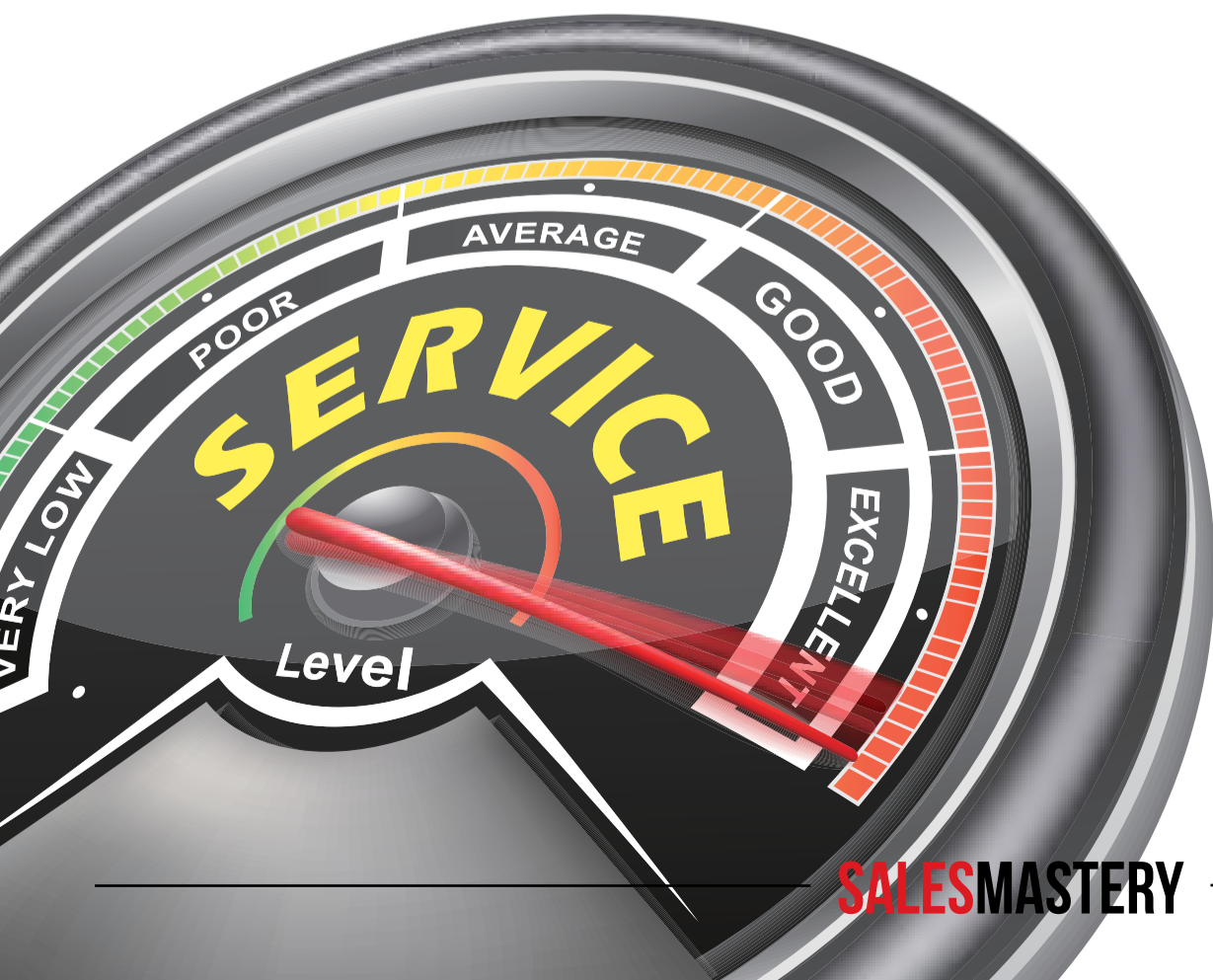
Here’s a second and simple response from [Carol Sanford](#), “Let’s figure out how to make this work for you.”

And finally, rather than “Sorry, this is our policy,” a better answer may have been “Your perspective is greatly appreciated, and I will share that with the appropriate people here. And, then, let the right people know... and follow through” says [Jon Mertz](#).

The sales professional that proactively practices good customer service contributes to the reputation of a trustworthy organization. They also create the competitive advantage called loyalty, and they bank trust with their customers. In the long run, the strategy pays off handsomely.



**Barbara Brooks Kimmel** is the Executive Director of [Trust Across America-Trust Around the World](#) whose mission is to help organizations build trust. She is also the editor of the award winning [TRUST INC.](#) book series. In 2012 Barbara was named “One of 25 Women Changing the World” by Good Business International.



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