

## Impress parents even when things go wrong

Helping your staff pre-think how to transform grumpy into loyal

***“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.”***

Bill Gates

***“Customers don’t expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong.”***

Donald Porter  
Vice President of British Airways

You are human. Your teachers are human. Your students are human. Your parents are human. At some point this year, something is going to go wrong.

This week’s Marketing Corner is the third in a series on customer service. Like the Corner on “everything matters,” this one is aimed at ways to work with your staff during pre-session for improving customer service this year. The quotes below come from *The Starbucks Experience*.

### **The bad news: You do need to “sweat the small stuff.”**

I know this will not be good news for you and your staff (even if they are all volunteers), but it is true. Here’s why.

“...It’s usually not a single, dramatic event that weakens a brand [read that as ‘reputation for a school’]. Most often, it’s a gradual erosion that can be explained away as a temporary issue or maybe ‘growing pains.’ Too often, the ‘exception’ of slightly lesser quality [or perceived quality] in time becomes the norm. The facilities look the same, but the customers’ experiences slip.” (p. 111)

### **The good news: When you do address a parent’s concern you can actually strengthen that relationship.**

“While we don’t always get the opportunity to have a second chance with a customer, occasionally people will let us know how we could have made their experience better. When that gift is given, we need to seize it. By examining an individual customer’s dissatisfaction, we have a chance not only to regain the trust of that customer, but to more broadly fix a process that is likely affecting other customers as well.” (p. 104)

After briefly sharing why customer service is important, I suggest two ways to shift the topic from the theoretical to the practical.

**Ask your staff to describe a time they were the unhappy customer (preferably of a higher cost service—not a cup of Pero).**

- After communicating their frustrations to the organization, how was their concern addressed?
- What was it about the interaction that left them feeling positively? Or negatively?
- How can that be applied to their interactions with parents?

**Ask your staff to role play...**

I am fairly confident you and your staff could draw on a reservoir of prior parent complaints. Pair up and take turns being the parent and the teacher. If you do this in a group, the other staff can provide feedback so it is not all coming from you.

*If you are the only teacher at your school:* You can certainly do the first activity on your own. Consider doing the second activity with your board chairman, a school volunteer, your superintendent or a friend (who is close enough to give you honest feedback).

**Binder tab:** August  
**School size:** All