

Wanted: real customer service

Dear Annie: Am I the only one who feels that life is too complicated these days and that I feel absolutely powerless when it comes to calling a big company to get service? I am old enough to remember the days when we bought a television, put it in the car, drove home, plugged it in, played with the "rabbit ears" for a minute and then were able to watch TV.



ANNIE LANE
DEAR ANNIE

Today, when you buy a television, it is a major project. If it's a big-screen TV, someone usually has to deliver it, and then you need to make an appointment with an installer. It always takes much longer for them to install than they plan.

Then there is the cable company. This morning I waited for over an hour for the cable guy to arrive. After working on the TV for more than an hour, he said he had the wrong parts and box and needed to go back to his office to get new supplies.

My wife had made lunch for me, but I told her to wait until this guy was finished. Then, after he left to get the new parts, we got a chance to eat, though we were both watching the clock.

Two hours later, the man returned and, after another hour, finally got everything set up.

Of course, I appreciate that the television quality and choice of channels are a million times better than those days of rabbit ears, but I feel so frustrated by the feeling of powerlessness I have if something goes wrong. You may as well call the federal government in terms of not getting a person. They have one recording after another, push this button or that, stay on hold for 20 minutes, and then maybe, if you are lucky, you will be able to talk to a live human.

The airlines are the same way. I remember the old days when I would call an airline, someone would answer the phone, book my flight or whatever, and we would both

be on our way. Now, in the "new and improved" technological society, there is never any personal customer service. Everything is automated and impersonal.

While we have had improvements because of technology, we have had regression in terms of customer service and personal attention.

I started writing this letter out of frustration with our cable company, but the more that I wrote, the angrier I got in thinking about how impersonal business has become. You always are the voice of common sense, and I'm wondering if you have any suggestions. **Helpless and Powerless**

Dear Helpless and Powerless: Help is on the way, and it is coming in the shape of you discovering your own power. While you might not have the power to fix your television immediately, you do have the power to change your perspective. You were able to have a pleasant, quiet and electronic-free lunch with your wife. Time without TV can sometimes be a nice break.

However, I agree with you that automated "customer service" is a contradiction in terms, though it has become common practice today. Customer service should be all about the customer feeling respected and heard. You are not alone in your frustrations.

We have seen many incredible advances because of modern technology, but the same cannot be said about typical customer service. Imagine if a company could offer the efficiencies of modern improvements with Marshall Field's old maxim from more than a century ago, "The customer is always right." The companies that can manage both are the ones that will emerge as victors in the future.

Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

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