

**AUGUST 2001: WE'RE  
ALL IN THIS  
TOGETHER!**



**MONTHLY FEATURE COLUMN: WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!**

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Two disparate events of this past month can be linked in an instructive way for those dealing with customer complaints. This month has been a challenging one for anyone flying in and out of San Francisco. An abundance of fog has put the airport into "flow" status on numerous occasions. When this happens, the airport has only one runway that it can use. In addition, all the major airlines schedule as many flights as possible during the most popular take off time slots. All this means is that traffic in and out of San Francisco was not a pretty picture this past month. I suspect this has happened in other parts of the United States as well.

The second event is the Code Red worm that threatens to shut down the Internet as I write. At a minimum, the Internet attack will probably means everything will run as slow as molasses in cold spring weather.

What's the link? Both of these events (and ones like them) are going to generate enormous numbers of customer complaints. Service providers need to be on the alert as to how to respond, or everyone could face some very unhappy customers in the month of August.

What can you do? These are not fixable problems in any meaningful way. Therefore, customer education, quick customer education, is essential. Let customers know that "we are all in this together." The airlines, of course, have some degree of culpability for this overcrowding of such airports as San Francisco. The alternative, however, is unacceptable. If they don't schedule flights during peak demand periods, their competitors will. It's an act of sacrifice that is too much to ask of a particular airline. At the same time, airline service providers need to protect themselves from customer sniper attack.

Here's what it looks like. A passenger comes up to the ticket agent and is informed that her flight is late again—the 7th out of 8 flights in July where this has happened. The ticket agent can say, "Thanks for saying something. You are right. It's a mess, and I personally apologize that you are going to be delayed. Something needs to be done about this overscheduling of flights during ...the morning...afternoon...evening. But they're not listening to me! I got caught in the same situation myself last week."

The immediate subtext of the communication is: We're in this thing together. We are buddies together being negatively impacted by the system.

I have to say, it works. It's exactly what was said to me this afternoon attempting to fly into San Francisco on a flight delayed over an hour and a half. And when the gate attendant said (more or less) those words, my stance towards him changed 180 degrees. How could I be upset with someone who was enduring the same situation as I?

I walked away from that encounter appreciating the skill of that ticket agent.

What are the situations you face, where a "We're in this together," message might help? Let me suggest that you may need to use it this month when your server goes down, becomes impossibly slow, or doesn't deliver the way it normally does, because of Code Red. If you are on the telephone with someone who wants to tell you that your web site isn't worth a hill of beans, swing into your "we're in this together," mode. You'll find you have a partner on the end of the other line. Then promise to do anything you can to help them. Code Red may be an opportunity for a number of companies to get closer to their customers.

I called a company this week to order a connector for one of my computers. Their telephone system was nonfunctioning. I called several times and by some miracle actually got someone to pick up a line. The first thing I said was, "You have to know that your telephone system doesn't work." He sighed, "Yes, I know. Isn't it terrible. We've been living with it for a month. We aren't getting much help in fixing it either. I'm so glad you got through." And then we handled my question. I hung up the telephone feeling sympathy for this company, with not a hint of anger or residual disappointment.

These are real world problems, and many of us are sharing similar situations with our customers. We're all in this together! Shared experiences make it possible for people to endure tragedy a lot easier. You can be that person for your customers.

### **WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING: JULY DEFINITELY WASN'T TOO HOT!**

Maybe it wasn't a particularly hot July, but if this is Las Vegas in the summer time, it is definitely not all that bad.

Of course, many of us affiliated with TMI weren't here for a big part of the month. That may have helped! Most of our trainers are still occupied with the Isle of Capri Managing People First programs. Peta Peter, Bill Oden, and Jossie Aguilar did the lion's share of the Managing People First programs throughout Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi this past month. They are thrilled with the anecdotal evidence of how well these programs are working. A lot of information is being taught in a short period of time, and everyone is working hard to keep up with it.

Peta Peter also flew to Washington D.C. to work with Ketchum on Time Management and Managing Anger, one of Peta's strong areas of interest. Bill Oden and Allan Milham have been working with the senior executive team of Eurand, America.

Among other venues, Janelle Barlow presented A Complaint Is a Gift programs for Washoe Health System in Reno. She finished out the month in San Ramon, California working for Chevron.

**August, 2001**

The month was punctuated by the National Speaker's Association, attended by both Janelle Barlow and Peta Peter. The convention in Dallas was superb. Bruce Wilkinson, the Program Chair, was brilliant in tying together one of the strongest programs the NSA has assembled in some time. Janelle is on the National Board of Directors of the NSA and is impressed with the care that the former Presidents and the current board members show in balancing the interests of the future of the Association with meeting current member needs. And it's all done in a volunteer capacity.

July also saw the convening of TMI's annual World Congress in Denmark. The theme of this year's conference was Alignment, a powerful concept for evaluating where an organization is headed. Just watching what the accused spy Hanssen has done to pull the F.B.I. out of alignment speaks to the fact that it doesn't take too much pulling in opposite directions to make an organization weaker. Our TMI partners from around the world have not suffered during this economic downturn. We are larger this year than last. This probably has something to do with the fact that TMI continues to reinvent itself as it has for the past 27 years.

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