



Customer service is an often overlooked or underplayed hand for vendors and association managers. However, it is the single most important aspect of a successful business. In fact, customer service is more important than quality. How can I make such a bold claim? I will give you two reasons:

life. Therefore, the end result of effective customer service is always high quality.

As a board member, it is critical that you understand and expect a strong performance in customer service from your vendors and management company.

I recommend that you ask the following questions

PERCEPTION IS REALITY: EXPECT EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE FROM YOUR VENDORS

Remember, selecting a quality vendor or manager is not a time to look for a bargain. A bargain is a low-cost product at a cheap price. What you should be looking for is quality for a fair price. This is called value. The important difference between a bargain and value is quality.

1. PERCEPTION IS REALITY

Since the customer is always right, his perception is what matters most. If he thinks he has a great manager, then it is so. If he thinks his vendor is the world's greatest, then it is also so. Perception is reality.



By Charles Antis

2. CUSTOMER SERVICE'S END RESULT IS QUALITY

While I cannot undervalue the importance of the best material applied by the best technicians, it is the vendors' willingness to solve problems when they occur that means the most to homeowners. When a mistake is realized, a vendor can put all of its efforts into remedying a situation, earning a customer for

to the homeowners' association referrals provided by potential vendors prior to making a contract decision:

1. Did the vendor have an onsite PR representative for the duration of the job?
2. When problems occurred, did the vendor communicate it to you and the manager in a timely and effective manner?
3. Do they return all phone calls?



4. Did the vendor satisfy all homeowners, even those hard to please, during the course of the job?
5. When a homeowner is upset, does the vendor follow-up with calls and letters of apology or explanation?



I also recommend that you ask the following questions to the referrals provided by potential management firms prior to making your selection:

1. Does the manager return your phone calls in a prompt manner?
2. Do they negotiate most of your communications between homeowners and vendors, and provide detailed records of such at monthly board meetings?



3. Are they easy to communicate with?
4. Do they problem-solve troubles with vendors and homeowners when they occur?

Remember, selecting a quality vendor or manager is not a time to look for a bargain. A bargain is a low-cost product at a cheap price. What you should be looking for is quality for a fair price. This is called value. The important difference between a bargain and value is quality. High-quality customer service costs the firms that utilize it. Therefore, you usually get what you pay for.

It is expected that all relationships with vendors and managers will be challenged. Isn't that Murphy's Law? Here is an example...



After completing a large condominium re-roofing project, a homeowner informed us that we damaged a small plant on her patio. We sent her a letter of apology with an accompanying certificate for two pounds of See's candy. We also offered her an exaggerated compensation for the small plant; \$100. Her response was a request for \$2,500, based on the fact that the plant was a gift from a dying relative, and was therefore irreplaceable. We finally agreed on a figure of \$850. This may seem unreasonable, but look what it did for the board of directors, the management firm and us, the vendor:

- » It kept an angry homeowner from attending open board meetings and damaging the reputation of the vendor.
- » It put a potential litigating matter to rest.
- » It kept the homeowners' association and manager from relentless letters and phone calls.
- » It allowed for both the management company and the homeowners' association to be a strong referral for the vendor.

Challenges such as damaged property, ineffective service and complaints from homeowners will occur with vendors and managers. Are your vendors making your job easier by providing effective customer service? Is your management company keeping you informed and handling your concerns in an organized and timely manner? If not, maybe it is time to look for a better value. After all, it is your opinion that matters most, because your perception is the reality.

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