

Why You Shouldn't Let People Fill in the Blanks

I have to admit, one of my biggest leadership challenges is simply responding to people.

I have great intentions of doing so. And if I'm totally honest, I do respond 100 percent of the time—in my head.

And that's the problem. People don't receive the responses that never leave my head.

I've worked hard to improve this one thing this past year. And one of my personal goals for 2014 is to make that even better. (Ask me in 12 months how that's gone.)

The reason I'm focused on this is based upon my own consumer experience in communicating with two different online companies. Both companies provide a service to which I have an annual subscription, both of which have developed tools and resources I find valuable and have become dependent upon. In short, I'm not looking for a better product. I'm satisfied with what they offer.

However, at different times this year I had a problem with my account with both entities. In each situation, I sent an email to the help desk requesting assistance. In both situations, my need was met, but in very different ways.

In one situation, my need was addressed and I received a return response letting me know how it was resolved and offering additional assistance if needed. There was no apology. It wasn't needed. But there was a kind, light-hearted response that let me know they were concerned about my need as a customer.

The other situation was different. Although my issue was

addressed and need met, I received no response. To this day, I'm not sure how the issue was resolved. I don't even know if the error was on their end or mine. I don't know if I'll encounter this again or how to avoid it in the future. I don't know.

And that's the problem. I've been left to fill in the blank. And that can be dangerous.

Building loyalty begins with communication. When others communicate with me, I find I trust them more. Those that do not, I find my trust diminishes because I'm left too much room to fill in the blank.

This is a convicting leadership lesson for me. I don't want people to perceive my lack of response as a lack of caring. This elevates my need to improve my communication, even if it's a simple acknowledgement. A timely response goes a long way toward building trust.

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