



micah
SOLOMON

The Complete Service
Recovery Playbook

How to turn unhappy customers into loyal fans.

(Most of them, at any rate.)

By Micah Solomon

Customer Experience Advisor,
Trainer, Speaker

At every business, no matter how well run, there are still times when a customer will become irritated, upset, or even infuriated. When this will happen can't always be predicted.
But your framework for response can.

Meet ACT!

To learn and retain the three steps I recommend for a service recovery response, just think of the acronym ACT, with my promise being: if you learn the ACT framework and practice it in advance, the next time you're confronted with an upset customer, *you'll know exactly how to ACT.*

Here in brief, are the steps involved in the ACT! service recovery method. We'll dig into each of these in a moment.

- A** Accept Responsibility
- C** Confirm
- T** Take action

On the following pages please review the complete ACT! Model for service recovery.

GOOD NEWS! Angry customers can become your biggest fans, according to science!

When a customer is saying—or even shouting—their dissatisfaction with your company, it can be hard to believe that you could ever make that customer happy again.

But take heart from the **SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN** "service recovery paradox."

The Science: When customers experience a problem with your company and have it resolved to their satisfaction, they often end up feeling better about your business than before the issue occurred.

Why? You've proven yourself to be more than a fair-weather friend. Your company becomes viewed as a reliable ally in both good times and bad.

The Result: A well-treated, formerly upset customer is more likely to become a loyal advocate than if nothing had ever gone wrong.

Bottom Line: Master the service recovery, and angry customers often return with increased trust in your organization.



www.micahsolomon.com | 484-343-5881 | micah@micahsolomon.com

A Acknowledge

C Step One is to acknowledge that you're sorry this happened, and that you will be their advocate from here onward, until you find a solution together. **(NOTE: this is the sentiment you want to convey. Please don't read from this as a script!)**

T To set the stage for doing this, stop whatever else you're doing, and focus, focus, focus. As the customer is unveiling what has upset them, don't interrupt. Hold your acknowledgment until they've had a chance to explain.

A Few Acknowledgment Steps:

- Don't interrupt with questions or explanations
- Don't try to solve anything yet.

This is tough for most of us because we want to be helpful and responsive. When a customer starts explaining why they're upset, we tend jump ahead to suggest a solution. But please: Don't.

Instead listen, keep listening, and then listen some more. Let the customer spell out what they feel went wrong in vivid, sometimes cringe-inducing, detail. This provides the customer with a feeling of release and reveals nuances that may be different from what you assume is the problem.

After listening, acknowledge how unfortunate the situation is. This is also, sometimes, the moment when you might apologize, if called for, meaning that the customer appears to feel that it's called for, not necessarily that you do!

Even if you have zero reason to feel that you or your company is at fault, or even if you know for certain that you aren't, you should **(Acknowledge)** convey that you recognize and regret what happened.

Here Are A Few Good Apologies

Here are three legitimate apologies with substance:

"I'm sorry that this happened."

"I'm sorry for the misunderstanding."

"I'm sorry this was such a hassle."

Here's what NOT to say:

~~"I'm sorry that you feel that way."~~

~~"I'm sorry if you feel that way."~~

~~"I'm sorry, I had other jobs that took priority."~~

Oh boy. This last statement may be true, but—say it with me—It's not an apology.

Note: This service recovery approach is not intended to guide you if confronted by an individual who is armed and/or threatening violence. Handling that is a different discipline, typically referred to as de-escalation training, which is not covered here and may diverge in significant ways.



A C: Confirm

C
T

Confirm exactly what went wrong, in the customer's viewpoint. What you initially think they're unhappy about may not be what is actually bothering them, or bothering them the most.

This is also where you confirm that the solution you think they want is actually attractive to them (and doable!). Strive to align yourself with your customer on what a solution should look like. This step is when you determine what the customer wants in terms of an optimal resolution.

Very importantly, commit to two things:

- What you're going to do.
- By when you're going get it done.



A T: Take Action

C
T

All that's left is the final step. Take care of the issue as you've promised. Make sure it happens by or before the agreed-upon date and time.

Remember: it's often how you do something as much as what you do that will impress a customer with your caring and commitment. Work with your customer in the most gracious, understanding, and patient manner possible.

One final note: If you're not able to deliver what you've promised solely by yourself, be sure to follow up with any colleagues you've delegated the response to. Miscommunications happen, just like in a game of "telephone." And, as in any sport, balls get dropped. You need to have your eyes open for either of these potential issues.

Making ACT! Work: Implementation Tips

Training Your Team

The ACT! framework should become second nature to your entire team.

Practice via scenarios: Role-play different types of upset customers and situations. The more your team practices the framework in a stress-free environment, the more naturally it will come when facing real angry customers.

Refine the language that you use. Create a reference guide of what phrases to use and to avoid.

For instance, “you need to,” “we would never have done that,” “it’s really not that big a problem, is it, and the fake apologies I mentioned above, all need to be avoided.

Empower Your Team

Give your staff a lot of discretion in resolving customer issues. The lifetime value of a loyal customer—which depends on your industry, but can be a very sizeable amount—makes it worth resolving complaints generously rather than quibbling over small costs

Your Ultimate Goal: Changing the Story

The aim of service recovery isn't exactly to fix whatever went wrong, though of course that is part of it. Your ultimate goal is to replace the story the customer is telling themselves about you, your company, and even about how their day is going with a new, more positive narrative.

This means that whatever you're doing logistically or financially for the customer can never be the whole point.

The success or failure of service recovery doesn't depend only on the black-and-white specifics of the ultimate resolution. It also depends on:

- The nuances of how you carry this out
- The patience and understanding with which you provide service in this stressful situation
- The pleasantness of engaging with you during the recovery process

These finer points can do as much as anything else to improve the feeling the customer takes home with them.

So, do everything you can to minimize the misery involved for your customer while making things right. Let the pleasantness of dealing with you on service recovery be part of the reward.

Service recovery can be done in a grudging way, an argumentative way; it can be delivered through clenched teeth. But going about it that way is never going to change the story for the customer, at least not in a positive way.

Conclusion:

Your Competitive Advantage

Service recovery done right isn't just about fixing problems; it's about creating loyal customers. When you master the ACT! framework and make it part of your operation, you transform your worst moments into your greatest opportunities.

And remember the service recovery paradox: customers who experience a problem that gets resolved often become more loyal than customers who never experienced a problem at all. That's your competitive advantage waiting to be claimed.

About Micah Solomon

Micah Solomon is a customer service consultant, keynote speaker, and bestselling author who helps companies from the tiniest mom and pops all the way up to enterprise organizations transform their customer experience.

*For additional training resources on the ACT! service recovery method and other customer service strategies, visit **MicahSolomon.com** or contact Micah directly for speaking and consulting opportunities.*





We can help

Need help implementing service recovery in your organization?

Micah Solomon provides customer service training and consulting to companies worldwide.

Contact at micah@micahsolomon.com | 484-343-5881 |

www.micahsolomon.com