

From *Even Monkeys Fall From Trees*

By Doug Lipp

Introduction

"**Even Monkeys Fall From Trees**" is an old Japanese proverb I particularly like. It means that regardless of how capable or skilled anyone is, sooner or later, we all lose our balance and make mistakes. You have probably never seen a monkey fall from a tree, even in a zoo. But everyone has seen remarkably capable people and successful companies make mistakes – in other words, fall from their trees.

At times, you probably have fallen from a few trees, too. How and when? Well, think of a skill or ability, which you are particularly proud of. Then, think of a time when you didn't perform up to your standards and let yourself or others down. That's a time when you "fell from the tree".

Your memories of these mistakes are certainly not ones you enjoy thinking about. However, you can learn a lot from them when you think over how and why you made the mistake, in order to make corrections, so you won't do it again. For example, ask yourself questions to identify what caused the problem in the first place. Was it your own lack of knowledge or the reaction you received from others? And if you remedied the situation, what behaviors or strategies helped your recovery?

The odds are slim that your "fall" occurred when you were alone. Most likely, others observed it and even reacted in some way. Also, the odds are pretty slim that your "fall" didn't affect or at least draw a reaction from your co-workers or customers. So think about their reactions and how you responded to them. Ask yourself: How did they react? How did you react? Did you remove yourself from the situation and take care of the problem later? Or did you think on your feet and remedy the situation in front of others?

Consider, too, if you were willing to own up to your own responsibility for making the mistake or not? If so, pat yourself on the back for a key step in remedying in the problem. Unfortunately, some companies and individuals refuse to take responsibility for their failings, preferring to blame the customer or market for their decline in profits or market share. But that's like blaming the weak branch on the tree for a fall, instead of looking at how they lost their balance to correct the problem. By contrast, when you do an outstanding job, you maintain your

balance. If you can think about when you or those in your organization did so and identify *what* you did and *how*, that will help you repeat your success.

This book takes the concept of learning from our successes and mistakes – the concept of keeping your balance on the tree -- and applies it to customer service. This way you can learn from both the highs of your really good days and the lows of your really bad ones. The great days are the ones where you feel you can accomplish anything. Nothing bothers you and you can provide outstanding service to all of your customers, even the most challenging ones. And then there are those bad days when you have difficulty even getting out of bed and don't feel very willing or able to deal with the most demanding customers. But that's part of the customer service game, because no one can be a customer service robot, always on, charming, and polite. Sometimes, the human element gets in the way, and everyone makes mistakes. In this book, the reference to customers includes not only your external customers, who buy your goods or services, but your internal customers as well, including your co-workers, managers, and subordinates.

This book draws on these principles of staying in balance and learning from your successes and mistakes to help you dramatically improve the quality of service you provide your customers. It leads you through a process to do this, which includes exercises you can use either individually or in group sessions with others in your company. Ideally, read the book on your own and analyze your own approach to customer service first. Whether you are an executive heading up a company or a front-line employee, reading the book and doing the exercises will help you think about your current approach, so you can identify both areas of strength and areas for improvement.

After you are comfortable with this approach yourself, encourage others in your company or work group to individually do the same. Then, try applying these techniques in a work group or company-wide, since the power of this approach lies in bringing together a whole work unit – from just two people to 100s -- to analyze the issues as a group. The size of the group doesn't matter. The key to changing successfully is to get together as a group to discuss the issues, practice effective approaches for *your* team, and commit yourselves to continually improve your approach to customer service.

By diligently applying these principles, you will discover how you can stay in the tree a little longer between the times when you fall off due to a problem or mistake. Plus, you'll find that when you inevitably do fall from time to time, you will be able to handle the situation successfully and recover, so you can attain your firm balance once again.

The Two Basic Elements for Achieving a Balanced Customer Service Approach:

Basic to staying in balance when you provide customer service are two elements, which are often overlooked, despite the outpouring of materials on customer service techniques. Indeed, many organizations and corporations have made a major effort in improving their service to customers, some with outstanding success. For example, many manufacturers have sped up product delivery and many products are cheaper, more durable and of higher quality than before. Many companies now take more seriously the need for good customer service to back up their products. Even so, many service providers still ignore these two very basic elements necessary for outstanding service, based on my observations and experience and what others have told me. These two basic elements which are essential to providing a successful balance of outstanding one-to-one customer service are:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Technical Ability2) Interpersonal Ability |
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Having **Technical Ability** means you have a complete knowledge of your job, your company's products or services, and its various policies and procedures. When you have technical ability, you are prepared to be *Knowledgeable and Helpful* and thoroughly understand the *Science* of customer service.

Having **Interpersonal Ability** means you have a good understanding of and ability to use appropriate communication skills with your customers. When you have interpersonal ability, you are prepared to be *Courteous and Friendly*, thereby understanding the *Art* of customer service.

I'll be describing how to master both abilities in discussing the science and art of customer service in this book.

These concepts are pretty basic, aren't they? Then, why doesn't everyone in customer service get or give good service consistently? Why the breakdown? The answer, quite simply, is that many people don't know how to balance the technical and scientific details of their job with the interpersonal and artistic qualities necessary to effectively interact with the customer. They aren't aware of these distinctions or don't know how to apply them to satisfy the customer. But if you want to succeed in providing high quality customer service, you must be able to do both to meet and even exceed your customer's expectations, which is the hallmark of outstanding service. And the key to doing this is by thoroughly understanding these two basic elements of outstanding service.

A good way to begin analyzing the quality of your customer service approach is to check the current state of your Technical and Interpersonal Abilities. Are you skilled in the technical side of your job, but uncomfortable dealing with people? Or are you a real people person, but

not sure of some technical aspects of your job? Can you do both, but are you inconsistent in your performance? Doing both consistently and well is what separates outstanding service providers from mediocre ones, especially in dealing with difficult situations, such as when you are faced with a concerned, frightened or angry customer. This book will help you develop strategies to master the appropriate reactions, even in difficult situations, which is one of the most important keys to successfully providing outstanding customer service.

Finally, this book invites you to examine the effectiveness of your support group, since you can't effectively provide good service, despite your best efforts to maintain a good balance, if the groups you rely upon don't do their part. For example, it is very hard for the sales staff to succeed if the factory is poorly run and product delivery is consistently late. Even with the best interpersonal skills, you will lose customers if the product or services you are selling are faulty or don't meet customer needs. Thus, besides looking at your own abilities, you want to examine if the systems in your company enhance or detract from your ability to consistently provide outstanding service. To do so, you want to ask questions, such as: "Is the procedure for ordering new supplies efficient, or is it outdated and cumbersome? Does the company's bureaucracy or management philosophy support or interfere with my ability to provide quick, creative solutions to customer concerns?"

In sum, regardless of your business or position in your organization, if you deal with external or internal customers, clients, or accounts, this book will help you provide them with outstanding customer service. Begin by using the exercises and questionnaires to help determine the *state of your customer service balance*. Then, as you identify areas where you need to improve, commit to making the necessary changes. The book will guide you in asking the questions such as: How flexible are you to the needs of your customers? Do you know what your customers expect and can you provide that and even more? How often do you surprise your customers with extra services they didn't expect? Do you have systems in place to identify and remedy problems *before* they occur?

As you go through this book, keep in mind the proverb, "*Even Monkeys Fall From Trees*", since you will be reflecting on how you and your team members, employees and management respond to situations when you "fall from the customer service tree" and have to engage in damage control. The way to stay on the ground and never recover once you fall is to deny the problems or blame others for your fall. By contrast, if you admit the problem and use feedback from customers or co-workers, you can strive to provide even better service, then climb back up into the tree and stay there even longer and more firmly until the next challenge comes your way.