

Customer Requests for Exceptions

Every business develops “ways of doing things.” When there is a plan in place we refer to it as a “policy” or “procedure.” At Kids First, we speak in terms of procedures rather than policies because of the coercive nature of policies (root word, police) which is inconsistent with our belief system. Procedures versus policies, notwithstanding, it is certain, your business will get its share of clients asking for exceptions and you must be prepared to deal with them effectively. Here is the Kids Firsts way of dealing with customer requests for exceptions:

1. People first, procedures second! Our front office department has recently been renamed Hospitality Department. It should be immediately and intuitively clear that a Hospitality employee must innately LIKE to serve and help others (not all people do)! Simply put, an employee who tends to care more about protecting company procedures than helping others will drive customers out the door no matter how hard she tries to mask her tendency.

2. Be professional in all things. Businesses that receive a steady diet of petty requests are probably somehow encouraging that behavior by generally acting unprofessionally.

3. Learn to walk the paradoxical line between being fun and firm. Clients gravitate toward businesses that are fun to do business with and alienate themselves from companies that are rigid and no fun. On the other hand, clients do not respect businesses that are wishy washy and neglect their own procedures; in fact, the public tends to take advantage of wishy washy businesses.

4. If a procedure is worth having it is worth enforcing. If you are not going to enforce a procedure, get it out of print and out of your company. For example: a customer who knows you don't enforce your make-up procedure will likely assume you don't enforce your payment procedure.

5. To assess yea or ney, train your people to inspect the wisdom of granting this exception by asking and answering these questions. Will granting this exception serve to:

- (1) Degrade safety?
- (2) Degrade the enjoyment or product value for other clients?"
- (3) Cause hardship for the teachers or coaches or others?"
- (4) Erode or weaken the procedure for others?"
- (5) Encourage this same party to ask for another exception?"
- (6) Offer a LONG TERM net GAIN or LOSS to the company, measured in dollars and good will?"

Hope you are going to have as good a year as I intend to have! Make it a great month! ✖

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