

Granting Exceptions to Procedures and Policies

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Every business develops 'ways of doing things' whether by happenstance or by plan. When a plan is behind it, we speak of 'procedures' or 'policies'. At Kids First, we prefer to think in terms of 'procedures' rather than 'policies' for the simple reason that a procedure is non-coercive, hence procedures tend to raise less resistance than policies (root word: police). Rent the classic movie 'Sea Biscuit,' a personal favorite of mine, and see how a non-coercive approach to training turned this horse into a champion of champions.

Regardless, procedures or policies, it is certain that your business will get its share of clients requesting exceptions and you must be prepared to deal with these requests. Here are Kids First's teachings on the subject.

- Be professional in ALL things. A lack of professionalism in one area will encourage petty complaints in other, unrelated areas.
- Stomp out apathy. Apathetic Customer Service gives Clients a justification to ask for exceptions when a procedure does not precisely align with their needs or lifestyle.
- Be assertive. Clients don't respect businesses that are wishy-washy

about their stated procedures. This encourages manipulative clients (yes, there are such people) to lean on the business, trying to gain an edge.

- If a procedure is worth documenting enforce it! Said another way, if you are not going to enforce a procedure get it off the books and out of print. Today. Now.
- The inclination to PROTECT or SERVE is the primary determinant in the success of a Customer Service person. More specifically, a Customer Service person whose knee-jerk reaction is to PROTECT procedures and policies will ANGER clients over and over again.
- On the other hand, a Customer Service person whose knee-jerk reaction is to SERVE (even when a request for an exception must be denied) will be liked and, make no mistake, being liked buys understanding and engenders loyalty. In short, the inclination to serve is the stuff of good relationships and the inclination to protect ticks people off!
- Therefore: For Customer Service positions (virtually everyone in a GymClub) hire ONLY people who are NATURALLY INCLINED to SERVE, as this quality cannot be trained! Additionally, hire ONLY people who have the ASSERTIVENESS TO GRACEFULLY

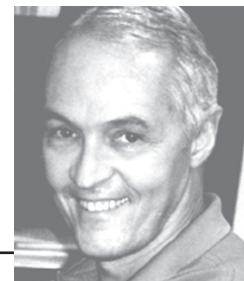
DENY A REQUEST when denying is the right thing to do. Both qualities are necessary; a double dose of one quality when the other is lacking will only cause pain and heartache for a company.

- Ask the following questions to determine if granting an exception is the right thing to do in a given situation. "Will granting an exception for this client...
 ...degrade safety?"
 ...degrade the enjoyment or product value for other clients?"
 ...cause difficulties for the teachers or coaches?"
 ...cause difficulties for the clients or students?"
 ...erode or weaken the procedure for others?"
 ...encourage the same party to ask for other exceptions?"
 ...cause a LONG TERM net gain/loss to the company in terms of dollars?"
 ...cause a LONG TERM net gain/loss to the company in terms of good will?"
- Finally, always remember this mantra we use here at Kids First, goodwill is more valuable than dollars. (Of course, right now, almost everything is more valuable than dollars).

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