

Why Mistakes Build Trust

by Andrea Howe (@AndreaPHowe) on Tuesday, November 17, 2009
(<http://trustedadvisor.com/trustmatters/why-mistakes-build-trust>)

My mechanic taught me something the other day about being a Trusted Advisor. He screwed up in a big way. And I ended up trusting him more as a result.

An Old Car and an Intimate Relationship with AAA

I love old cars and I drive a 19-year-old Mazda Miata as my primary vehicle to prove it. This necessitates an intimate relationship with AAA, as well as Gray's Auto in Arlington, VA, where I've taken my cars for years with good results. A few weeks ago my car overheated on the way to an appointment. AAA came to the rescue, depositing me at Gray's where Kevin and crew graciously inserted their unexpected visitor near the top of the list of waiting customers. It took days (and a lot of money) to diagnose and fix the problem. When I arrived at the scheduled time to pick up the car, it wasn't ready—still being test-driven. It didn't pass the test. I sat in the grimy waiting room for nearly three hours until it was (ostensibly) ready to go. Then half a mile into my drive home it overheated again—dead as a doornail in the right-hand lane of a busy DC thoroughfare. It was Saturday; growing dark; raining. I wasn't the happiest of campers.

I called Kevin. He was embarrassed and frustrated, and tried valiantly to find a wrecker (on their dime) to retrieve me faster than AAA could. No luck. "We'll stay open for you," he assured me.

Ninety minutes later my haul and I were back at Gray's, where Kevin and crew waited to take care of me. They handled the situation beautifully. They were responsible and apologetic, not defensive and guilt-ridden. They didn't explain or justify or blame; they simply said, "We'll take care of it." Then Kevin's boss insisted on driving me home, stopping along the way for take-out (on his dime) so I wouldn't have to worry about dinner. And in the end, there was no additional charge for the final repair, even though they'd spent considerable money on parts and labor replacing another failed temperature sensor. We joked when I picked up the car the second time about a mutual desire not to see each other again for at least a couple of months.

Trust Doesn't Just Trump Screw-ups: Screw-ups Can Create Trust

So why do I trust Kevin—and Gray's Auto—more as a result of this experience? Because I've seen their true colors. I know what they stand for. And I am confident that, given another challenging situation, they will rise to the occasion. Could they have fixed the problem the first time? Maybe; I don't really know and I don't actually care. What I'm left with is an experience of being looked after by people who chose to do right by me, which far outweighs the costs (tangible and intangible) of a one-time goof.

Mistakes are an opportunity for us to show the world what we're made of—to make known how we handle ourselves and who we choose to *be* in a moment of truth. Don't be afraid to screw-up. When you do (and you will because we all do), don't cover it up with excuses or defensiveness or blame or avoidance tactics. Show your clients who you are for them. Do the right thing and they'll learn they can count on you for far more than parts and labor.

