

Asking the wrong question is poor communication (part 2)

This post is about how Delta Airlines compounded a bad experience by asking the wrong questions. Here's the story:

International flight on Delta

A few weeks back I was returning to the United States on Delta from a trip abroad. My first port of entry was Delta's major hub, Atlanta. If you've traveled internationally you know that you must claim your suitcase and then pass with it through customs, to then be able to check it back through to your final destination. However, on this occasion, my suitcase never arrived in the customs baggage claim. And even though I asked several Delta agents and baggage claim workers, not one person was able to tell me where my bag was, if it had been loaded off the plane or even if it had arrived in Atlanta at all.

Tweeting doesn't help at all

I was forced to check with Delta's customer "service" counter outside the customs area, where I was quite unhelpfully told my bag would "automatically" be transferred to my Washington bound flight, since it was tagged to DCA. I tweeted Delta to see if they could help me find out the whereabouts of my bag. Their response was to ask me if I had spoken to a manager. That was not the right question. The question should have been "how can we help?" If I had spoken to a manager (which, I would have had one been available and I did not have to catch my next flight), why would I be tweeting @Delta?

Do you really want to know what I think?

Well, my bag did not arrive at Washington with me on my flight. It was delivered to my home the next afternoon. At

which point, Delta sent me the following email, with the subject line "Deborah, We Value Your Opinion:"

Dear Deborah, We are very sorry for the baggage mishandling you experienced on May 05, 2016. As a valued SkyMiles member, your feedback about your experience is important to us and will help us continue to improve. We ask that you please provide feedback on your experience by answering the question below.				
How likely are you to recommend Delta Air Lines to others?				
Definitely Will	Probably Will	May or May Not	Probably Will Not	Definitely Will Not
5	4	3	2	1
Your feedback is important to us and again, we offer our deepest apologies for this inconvenience.				
Sincerely, Gil West Chief Operating Officer				

There are literally countless other questions they could have asked such as: was my bag delivered in good shape, as promised, was the delivery service professional, did DCA baggage services handle my claim correctly, did the service met my expectations or anything at all about the actual incident. Delta would have had to ask questions like that if it actually cared about its operations and customer experiences. Instead, Delta only wants to know if, based on this experience, I would recommend it to others.

That was not the right question. It showed me that Delta is only interested in its reputation and not even vaguely about their operational efficacy or customer experience.

I wrote Delta a three-page letter (not an email) about this travel experience (there were other issues too). I enumerated the various things that Delta should look into and correct

(customer service, their Twitter presence, among others). I got a two-paragraph email back, basically repeating what I had mentioned and offering me some Delta SkyMiles for my troubles.

No, really, what do you think of us?

And then I got another email from Delta with the subject line "Deborah, We Value Your Opinion." This is what this email said:

Dear Deborah,				
We recently sent you an email regarding your Delta Customer Care request. It was our pleasure assisting you.				
Our goal is to deliver the very best service possible, so your feedback is important in helping us recognize and improve our quality. Please begin this short survey regarding how I did by answering the first question below:				
How likely are you to recommend Delta Air Lines to others?				
Definitely Will	Probably Will	May or May Not	Probably Will Not	Definitely Will Not
5	4	3	2	1

Again, Delta is mostly interested in whether I would recommend Delta. Which, again, is not the right question. The question should be whether I was satisfied with the response to my letter (I was not) or whether the response had addressed any of my concerns (not to my knowledge).

Do you really want to know?

Companies that are serious about improving ask for real feedback. To ask me whether I would recommend Delta is not a good or useful question. It is poor communications and even poorer customer service.

What do you think? Would you have answered this question? What benefit does it provide the company and does it provide any benefit to the customer?

