

Rick's Rants

The magic of an immediate apology

So, I'm sitting trying to watch two baseball games at once, and I'm using the magic "last" button on my remote to go from one to the other between innings.

On one of those switches, I noticed that my HD signal went to regular old television quality and picture size. Not a big shock; it's happened before. Usually it corrects itself in a few minutes.

A few minutes came and went. Nothing. So, I tried the old "unplug the cable box, wait 60 seconds, plug it back in and let it reboot" trick. Nothing.

So, I settled for standard definition for the rest of the night, not wanting to sit on hold with the cable company.

The next day, it was the same. So, of course, I tried the same solution. Nothing. (What's that definition of "insanity" again?)

This time, I decided to throw myself into the abyss that is the cable company "customer service" phone queue. I called, I pushed all the buttons that would take me to a human, and then I listened to 20 minutes of commercials telling me about all the great services that I should "ask the customer care representative about." I had a different conversation in mind, of course.

Well, Chantelle (I'm guessing at that spelling) finally got on the line and issued the standard greeting. I explained my issue and that I'd tried rebooting twice and still nothing.

Her first words? "Let me apologize on behalf of Time Warner Cable for the problem you are having. I know that it must be frustrating, and I'm here to help."

Was it a script? Of course. Did it sound canned when Chantelle said it? Not at all.

Over the course of the next three or four minutes, she walked through a series of steps to discover that I had somehow pushed a button marked "aspect" in switching back and forth between games, which had shut down the HD signal. That's what I get for watching baseball in a darkened room, I guess.

She corrected the problem without making me feel dumb, and even laughed when I told her I was relieved that I didn't have to bring my cable box in.

Cable companies get a well-deserved bad reputation for prices that are too high and service that is too slow. (It would have been nice to get an estimate of my wait time,

rather than commercials.) But Chantelle starting the conversation with an apology changed the dynamic right away.

It's amazing what taking responsibility for something that is not your fault can do toward building and strengthening relationships with key audiences.