

next tuesday afternoon

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As if being a CEO wasn't tough enough, now you have to learn a new skill: the art of apologizing. From Apple's Steve Job to JetBlue's David Neeleman, the list of C-level apologizers is getting longer by the minute.

So what gives? It's a convergence of many things, not the least of which includes losing control over how things are going *to be* and losing touch with customers. The bottom line? Customers are driving businesses in ways not imagined a few short years ago. Customers are holding everything and everyone accountable for their actions.

Everybody knows that a brand is more than a product name or company logo and that loyalty can't be bought with advertising. Brand loyalty is what customers give to companies who make good on their claims and consistently deliver credibility. As trust and credibility grow, brand failures become much more costly. Dell lost customers' trust when service slipped, Mattel lost trust and credibility over lead-tainted toys. And Celestial Seasonings was battered when it poisoned prairie dogs on their property, all the while advertising their environmental stewardship. Oops.

This unwritten contract between customers and the brands they buy is two-fold: 1) consistently deliver what you advertise, and 2) treat each customer with respect. These days, it's more important than ever to make sure your company's values are instilled in every person your customer may touch. At one company, a very large account called and asked to speak to the CEO. The employee's reply? "I'm sorry, sir, the CEO doesn't talk to customers." Double oops.

The moral of this story is pretty simple. If you haven't done so already, open up your customer communication channels so you can find out what your customers really care about, not those that make the executive team look good.

I'm Lisa Davis. Let me know if I can help you in any way, please feel free to visit at OneAlliance.com and I'll be back next Tuesday afternoon.

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