

In tough times it pays to plan for things going wrong

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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Getting more business, staying in profit or just plain surviving, depends a lot on planning for things going wrong and knowing how to react quickly and properly.

I looked back at an article I wrote exactly 10 years ago and found that the points I made are probably even more pertinent today than they were a decade ago after the global economic crash.

This applies particularly at times when a lot of companies are cutting costs by reducing staff levels and putting service delivery at risk.

Thinking logically, every product, service or profession depends entirely on its customers. There are no exceptions. So, it makes sense not to risk doing something that will literally chase customers away.

But, the problem is that while most companies train their staff how to deal with customers, what very few do is train their staff how to deal with situations when things go wrong.

You can see this all over South Africa. At petrol stations, hotels, restaurants, shops, hospitals, dentists and just about anywhere a customer comes into contact with sales people, receptionists, technical people and so forth. Even at Home Affairs and other government and municipal, departments.

As long as there isn't a problem, the customer service is always very good.

But, when things go wrong, the lack of proper training costs companies a fortune in lost business.

Receptionists, sales people, call centre operators, all become very defensive and you can literally see them losing the plot completely. Their first big mistake is they go into denial almost immediately and then try and make it the customer's problem.

I really feel sad for these people because they are clearly out of their depth and ill-equipped. And they are the one's who get into trouble when the issue escalates up to executive level and the big boss just caves in to the customer because he just doesn't have time to argue.

I cannot stress how important it is for companies to specifically train their front line staff on what to do when things go wrong. Instead of just showing them how to smile.

The most important thing of all is never to call this “customer service training.” The reason being that all human beings believe fervently that they already know how to serve customers. So they either don’t attend these training sessions or simply don’t pay attention.

My way of doing this training is rather to put the emphasis on how to make this life of front line staff easier and more enjoyable. Now that, gets their attention.

In reality it’s the same thing with a different emphasis. Because staff who really get to understand how to handle customers will automatically make their lives a lot easier.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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