



## Serving Customers... and Employees The Challenges of 24/7 Emergency Service

By Bernadette Braman

How to support our employees in their work life balance and still provide fanatical customer service to our customers?

That's a question that came up over dinner recently, as my husband and I enjoyed a recent night out. It's probably the same question that many business owners grapple with, especially those who offer 24/7 emergency service.

As customers are increasingly accustomed to immediate service, it's important to manage emergency off-hour service calls in a way that meets the needs of the customer while protecting hard-working staff from approaching their burnout point.

The problem is that some customers suffer from what my brother often refers to as "the microwave syndrome". That is, they're used to immediate gratification thanks to the invention of the microwave oven 4+ decades ago. Everyone has grown accustomed to placing an order on Amazon and getting it delivered the same day or next. People expect immediate service, and that can be a challenge when a business offers 24/7 emergency service. The key word here is "emergency."

As a business that services generators, emergencies do come up. If the power goes out and the generator doesn't start, that's an emergency. If it's a life safety generator, that's really an emergency.

We are always there for emergencies. That's why you'll see our vehicles on the roads during states of emergency - because we back up emergency services. We're some of the essential workers helping to maintain the country's infrastructure.

But sometimes, customers have a different idea of what qualifies as an emergency and that can be frustrating to our employees.

Don't get me wrong, we appreciate our customers and work hard to meet their expectations. But we're also very aware of how hard our employees work, and we understand that they have family dinners, children's baseball games, pets, and lives too. So just as I stand up for my customers, I want to stand up for my employees too! If a customer declares an emergency, we want it to be a real emergency.

The thing that defines a real emergency for us in our business is if a customer is out of power and their generator is not working. During times of high call volumes our staff tirelessly works long hours to ensure we get to all those customers as quickly as humanly possible. Key word there is humanly. They are humans and do need to eat, sleep and recharge to maintain the quality work you've come to know and expect.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that so many businesses in the building trades are short staffed, as there's a shortage of technically trained young people. We're really feeling the crunch.

It's often said that good employees are a business' most important asset, and it's true. My people care so much about what they do, and they will work so hard, sometimes they are literally roused out of bed to respond to an emergency.

So, there's a fine line: business owners must manage how to serve customers while protecting and retaining good employees.

The solution is effective messaging with your customers and cultivating a respectful relationship. Educating the customer is key. That can be done through conversation, on your website, and through newsletters. It's also important that your answering machine or service employs the right script. For us, the message is that we care about our customers, but non-emergency service should be handled promptly during normal business hours.

Managing customer expectations can be a win-win. By investing time in getting the right message you'll strengthen your relationship with customers while improving the morale of employees.

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