

Tell Me a Story

By [Cindy Campbell](#)

I'VE GROWN INCREASINGLY DISENCHANTED with the escalating price of my cable television. I would even go so far as to say it's become downright offensive. Not to sound like Methuselah, but I'm from the generation that created and first embraced cable TV. Before the internet, it gave us the ability to instantaneously connect to our larger world like never before. The connected world we live in today offers so many more options for global information sharing—and at a much lower price than most cable companies offer. Yes, my decision was made; the time had finally come to cut the cable cord.

With that decision out of the way, the next obvious task was to contact the cable company to figure out how to go about disconnecting. Swirling in my mind were the tales I'd heard from others—the stereotypical, cringe-worthy stories about frustrating phone calls with the cable company's customer service representatives. With so many competing services available, they'd certainly taken steps to positively respond to the public outcry regarding their notoriously bad reputations, right? Additional customer service classes? Listening skills? Perhaps increased conflict resolution training? You would think so, but alas, from my recent experience, it appears that's not the case (insert heavy sigh, eye roll and disapproving head shake here).

The Call

The pre-recorded voice informed me that my wait time was estimated to be 30 minutes. Twenty-eight minutes later, I was greeted with what I can only describe as the most apathetic agent on duty. No exaggeration, it was like pulling teeth to get even the slightest bit of help or information. Her flat tone conveyed a heaping helping of disinterest with a just a dash of hostility. Without relaying the entire conversation, her responses included phrases like, "I can't tell you that," "I can't do that," "I wouldn't know," and "I don't have access to that information". It was her winning combination of poor word choice and indifferent tone that painted the complete picture. She made no



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effort to provide me with available options. My every attempt to communicate in a friendly, professional way was rebuffed. The phone call ended when her ability to be obstinate exceeded my willingness to tolerate it.

Much like my story of the bad cable experience, most everyone out there has a favorite parking horror story to tell. While some of those tales may contain bits of truth, others are full of incorrect assumptions and have become legendary—larger over time. Legendary tales aren't easily put to rest, especially if we're presented with examples that confirm them to be true for us personally. A customer may start a conversation with us, holding on to these fabled stories about who we are and how we will interact with them. Their initial attitudes and preconceived ideas about us may not be reasonable, yet they are their starting-point reality. While these baseless assumptions may be wholly unfair to us, what are we doing to change their expectations? What story will they be telling others about their interaction with you?

Beating Assumptions

Just as I had pre-conceived ideas about what attitudes I may possibly encounter with the cable company, our customers may start their interactions assuming the worst outcome. Their defensiveness and angry words may not mean what we initially perceive. Sometimes anger and frustration are the initial emotions a customer communicates to us. Our role is not to respond in kind, but to actively listen for the real meaning of their message. Even if we can't give the customer the answer they want, we need to make the effort to provide them with information they need and the options they have. Setting aside our instinctual, emotional reactions to their tone and approach is not only helpful to getting the customer what they need, but also offers us the ability to change that person's perception about the services of your organization and who you are as a professional.

Your attitude, word choice and demeanor may be the key to changing the story the next time it's told. ♦



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BUSINESS VISION

We seek to streamline and optimize control of your parking structure, its management, productivity and security. Our differentiation and competitive advantages enable you to improve the level of service, while exploring new business opportunities.



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