



Hugging the Cactus

Creating a Culture of Ownership and Responsibility



Hugging the Cactus: Creating a Culture of Ownership and Responsibility

Learning how to navigate through a difficult situation at work is inevitable. Sometimes you may find that you've made a mistake, or a shipment has been delayed, or a customer simply ordered the wrong item, but what defines a company's culture is what happens *after* these issues arise.

Simply recognizing that mistakes should be handled in a positive way has the power to transform you and your organization into something better and is crucial to building a healthy culture for your business. There's an expression used to characterize this called "hugging the cactus" and it's foundational to our culture at Earnest Machine. This phrase exemplifies how we place the needs of our customers above all else, despite whoever is at fault.

Hugging the cactus is just that. When something goes wrong—regardless of how, why, or who caused it to go wrong—we embrace it, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. This mindset allows our employees to not feel at fault or punished when issues inevitably arise. Instead, it gives them the space they need to figure out how and why the situation went wrong, take responsibility for it, and create a solution that meets the needs of their customers. It not only works but it helps build a culture of trust and respect between individuals, teams, and our customers.

At Earnest Machine, there are many examples of how we've hugged the cactus so that we can create the best customer experience possible.



When An Order Goes Sour

A few months ago, one of our salespersons received a high-volume order for a standard part. However, we didn't have this item in stock. This posed a dilemma because the order was significant, and the customer needed the parts right away. The salesperson was able to find stock on this item from a domestic supplier and was able to have the parts stripped and replated with an acceptable finish that met the supplied MTR's requirements and the customer's deadline.

However, after delivery, their end user began to report problems of the fastener's heads shearing off upon installation. What could have caused this? The parts met the specifications per the supplied MTR and therefore should not have had any problems. Our customer's end user decided they wanted to return the parts.

Since this was a special order due to the strip and replate process that was done earlier, we wouldn't normally offer the ability to make a return, especially since everything was correct on the MTR. In this case, neither Earnest Machine nor the customer was at fault.

However, instead of creating blame and pointing out the order's specifications, the salesperson saw the customer's need, decided to hug the cactus, and did what they thought was right for the customer, not necessarily what was right for the business.

This incident resulted in a stronger relationship between Earnest Machine and our customer, who has since returned many times for new orders. The relationship took a turn for the better because we decided to adhere to our mission statement of creating the best customer experience possible instead of saying "sorry, that's not my problem."



Helping Team Members Grow

Recently, we had a salesperson overlook a revised purchase order in their email, which led to the order never being placed. An incident like this could have easily led to frustration or animosity between coworkers. Instead, our sales team worked together to reallocate lots to expedite the late order for the customer. Not only that, but the incident led the salesperson to reevaluate how they worked and to create more effective processes. “I’ve since made changes to my Outlook that allow me to better track emails, and I’m working on getting pricing files to help me streamline the process that we currently follow,” the employee said. “The customer was happy that we were able to expedite their order and fix the issue.”

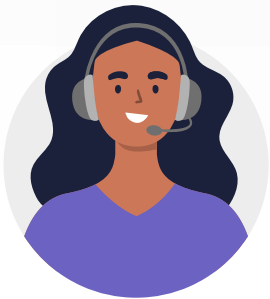
Another employee shared that they once selected an incorrect part when setting up a secondary purchase order. They said of the experience, “I am grateful I had a very helpful and understanding team who made this 'hugging the cactus' experience not as bad as it could have been. This is one of the many things I love about Team Earnest—we help each other out and continuously learn together!”



When A Customer Finds We Messed Up

During a past inventory audit, a customer of ours discovered we had sent them the wrong parts. But our return policy explicitly states that returns should be made within thirty days from date of receipt.

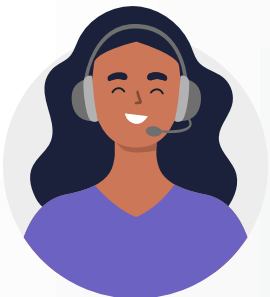
Here's how that dialogue unfolded:



Customer: "Hello, we unfortunately found that we received the wrong parts when reviewing our inventory. We should have been sent jam nuts instead of hex head cap screws. Would you be able to send over a return merchandise authorization, or is this purchase order too old to return?"



Earnest Machine salesperson: "Yes, technically this order is too old to return, but this is clearly our mistake. Please scrap these parts, and we will issue a credit. I apologize for this. Thank you for reaching out and allowing me to help!"



Customer: "I have to say, that is one reason why we love Earnest Machine! You take full responsibility for your actions, even if they were a long time ago. Thank you for being awesome and working with us!"

In this situation, it would have been easy for the salesperson handling this order to simply stick to Earnest Machine's return policy. However, we clearly shipped the wrong parts. Regardless of the time frame, we made the mistake, and the right thing to do was to correct it. Doing anything else would have felt wrong, so the salesperson hugged the cactus and made it right with the customer.

Embracing the Discomfort

At Earnest Machine, hugging the cactus is all about leaning into an issue, embracing the momentary discomfort, and getting through it. It's about creating ownership of the situation and finding a solution that works for the customer, individual, or team.

Hugging the cactus is also the first step in trying to resolve whatever the issue may be. Sure, it's uncomfortable, but we use these opportunities to be transparent with one another and by doing so, open the door to honest and effective communication. This mindset helps us cultivate a culture of trust and allows our team members to grow with each other and feel confident in their decision-making process.

By creating a culture of ownership and responsibility, you eliminate any toxicity that may exist with an unhealthy work culture. You'll find that employees are genuinely happier, more engaged, and willing to go the extra mile to find creative solutions that benefit their customers.

