



Three Steps in Managing Customer Crisis

by Curtis N. Bingham

**CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER
COUNCIL**

A white lighthouse with a glass-enclosed lantern room on top, set against a blue background with a yellow and orange curved graphic element. The lighthouse is positioned on the left side of the page, with a beam of light extending from its lantern room towards the right.

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Customer crises strike without warning, and the chief customer officer must act swiftly and decisively to begin rebuilding damaged customer relationships. Over my years of experience working with scores of chief customer officers, I've found three steps that are crucial in successfully managing any crisis:

Build Strong Customer Insight *Before* Crisis Strikes

As owner of the customer you know the value of thorough customer research, but having detailed data is particularly vital when crisis strikes: your unique customer insight must form the basis of a successful response strategy. Relying on that insight you will be able to specifically target touch points that will resonate with your customers, identify areas of the organization's plan that may exacerbate negative opinion, and determine the best strategies for mitigating that negativity. Have a comprehensive customer research program in place *before* you're faced with crisis to ensure that the information is there when you need it most.

Focus the Organization on Customer Impact

It's all too common for the wider organization to focus on damage control—acting in self-defense, laying blame, or stonewalling. But this will only worsen already injured customer relationships. Instead, it's imperative for you to lead the organization to focus on customer impact at every step along the road to recovery. This is not to say that every action must have a positive impression; we know there are times the organization must act despite negative impact. Your job is to ensure that at every step someone is asking the question: *how will this affect customers?* If it's positive, highlight it in a way that strengthens customer relationships, and if it's negative, use your customer insight to mitigate the damage.

Rebuild Damaged Trust

Incorporating high customer touch into routine operations allows you to rebuild trust while creating sustainable customer centric change. Seek opportunities for reassuring customers not only within the recovery, but throughout the organization. Look for functions that can be updated or repackaged to highlight positive customer impacts. Share information with customers by updating call center scripts, or devise high touch outreach programs to provide understanding about particular actions or operations of the organization. Customer trust will return only when customers feel they are receiving honest and forthcoming communication about the problems affecting them and the steps you are taking toward resolution.



About CURTIS N. BINGHAM

As Executive Director of the Chief Customer Officer Council™, Curtis Bingham is the recognized authority on chief customer officers and the first to promote this role as a catalyst for competitive advantage. He is the creator of the CCO Roadmap, a groundbreaking work containing 100+ critical strategies essential for customer centricity. As an international speaker, author, and consultant, Curtis is passionate about creating customer strategy to sustainably grow revenue, profit, and loyalty.

About THE CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER COUNCIL

The Chief Customer Officer Council is the first of its kind; a member-led peer-advisory network offering unparalleled insight into the critical issues facing CCOs. It was created to provide a safe environment where CCOs can share ideas, concerns, and build best practices that will help them, their companies, and especially their customers succeed. The Council includes CCOs from diverse industries, purposefully cross-pollinated with the most forward-thinking companies, large and small. For more information, visit www.ccocouncil.org, email info@ccocouncil.org or call 978-226-8675.



Navigating the Storm – In this article by Curtis N. Bingham, featuring Helen Burt, Chief Customer Officer of California’s largest utility company, Pacific Gas & Electric, you’ll learn four proven practices for managing customer crises that you can begin to implement *before* crisis strikes.

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For more resources from Curtis Bingham and the CCO Council, including articles, videos, and *The Bingham Advisory*, visit www.ccocouncil.org.

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