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# The *Edge* of Service®

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## Why Customers Hate Waiting

This is me at Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo. I'm there to experience the busiest pedestrian crossing in the world. Odd as it may be, I get a kick out of studying queues. And, wait times really, really matter to our customers. But what frustrates customers isn't always the wait itself.

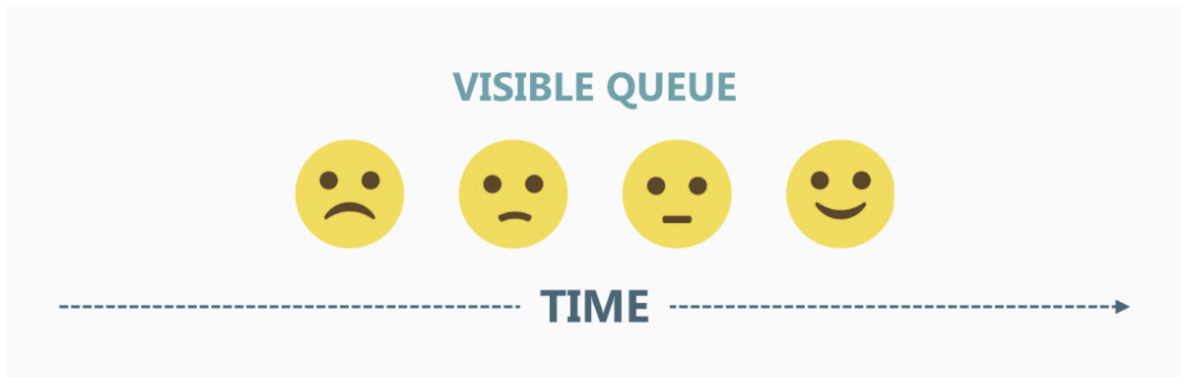
I've studied queues for years in contact centers, security lines, events, and other customer service environments. I've observed how they can quickly develop on busy expressways. And, probably like you, I've made many decisions on where to eat, stay, or go based on what I expect the waits to be.



And yes, like you, I've formed impressions about brands and how much organizations care based on how long they make me wait and how they handle the process.

From a customer's perspective, there are two basic types of queues. Queues are either visible or invisible. Let's take a look at each.

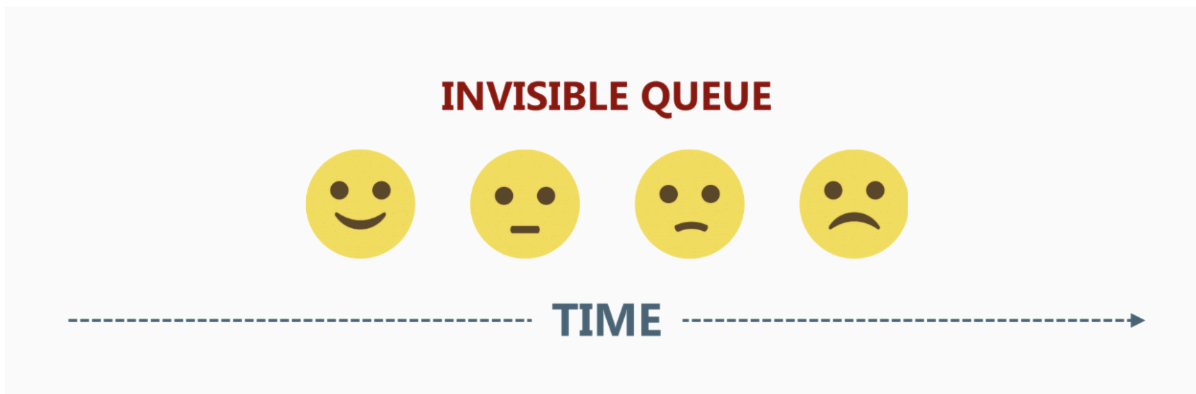
A visible queue is one that customers can see: for example, in a grocery store, or going through the ticket booth at an event venue. This graphic shows how customers generally feel as they wait in a visible queue.



Few customers would choose to wait in line, but as they move forward, the faces illustrate progress. The final face reflects someone who is now at the front of the line. They made it!

Visible queues refer to ANY situation where customers know where they are in line. Many contact center systems provide wait time estimates to customers: “you can expect to reach an agent within 7 minutes.” Even though customers can’t actually see who else is waiting, we’d refer to that as a visible queue. The same definition applies when an app updates customers waiting for a restaurant or a ride at the theme park. Customers know where they are in line. Those are visible queues as we’d refer to them here.

The other type of queue is invisible. It’s represented in this graphic.



Customer expectations may be high, initially. But after some amount of waiting, customers begin to doubt that they are going to get right through, that’s the second face. The third face illustrates the transition from doubt to mild frustration. If they are calling, they may have heard a delay announcement (“all of our representatives are currently assisting other customers”).

The fourth face represents those who, from their perspective, have waited too long. Often, the first thing they do when they reach an employee is to tell them about the tough time they had getting through. That’s not good because it takes even more time and further backs up the queue.

As customers, we still often encounter invisible queues, e.g., when calling for support, waiting in a busy doctors’ office, renewing a license, or many other scenarios. We don’t know where we stand, and we don’t like it.

Back to Shibuya Crossing for a moment. It looks like chaos. People moving in every direction. But it actually works quite nicely. Everyone knows when it's their turn. Everyone can see what's happening.

Now imagine the same intersection. No signals. No visibility. No sense of when to move. That's what an invisible queue can feel like.

Invisible queues can lead to poor decisions. There's psychology at work here. A customer who calls an organization might give up after, let's say, 8 minutes. What they don't know is that they would have reached an employee in 8 minutes and 10 seconds!



That's not a capacity problem. That's an information problem. Customers want to know what's happening, and they want alternatives. "Can you call me back?" "Can you text me?" When customers have that information, they make better decisions. And they're far more likely to stay engaged.



*Watch the video to see Shibuya Crossing in action!*

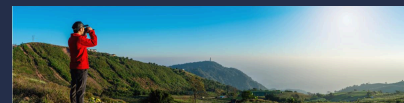
## Did you know?

**96% of customers who have a high-effort service experience report being disloyal, compared to just 9% who have a low-effort experience.** (CEB, now part of Gartner)

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## *How to Manage Customer Queues*

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