

5 Keys to Keeping Customers for Life

In over 25 years as a speaker, coach and consultant working with companies to improve customer and workplace relationships I find that the main key for success now and in the future is through excellent customer service. In fact, the only way to really differentiate yourself and to become less of a commodity in the marketplace is through superior customer service. Tom Peters states that, ‘if you are customer oriented you are ahead of 98% of the other businesses because they are not.’ Furthermore, a study done by the US Chamber of Commerce on why do people give up on your company found that ‘68% quit because of an attitude of indifference toward the customer by the owner, manager or employee.’

The bottom line is that you must treat everyone like they are your only customer and consistently build trust, rapport, relationships and connect with them. Remember, ‘You’re not just closing a sale, but opening a relationship’ and that many times the most abused client is the sold client. Never let them forget how much you appreciate their business. By understanding these simple principles you will realize that treating your current customers ‘right’ will reap the rewards you seek. As studies have shown, it is 6 times less expensive to keep, upsell, resell or get referrals from satisfied customers than it is to get new customers. Only by developing win-win relationships can you increase your business, lower your costs and achieve maximum profitability. To be successful, follow these five guidelines on a daily basis.

1. Be Reliable.

Reliability means many things, but without it your business will fail to grow and prosper. For example, when you tell a client you will get them something by a specific time and you’re late, your good reputation suffers. In fact, since so many others don’t deliver on time, follow up or do what they say they are going to do, you end up ‘standing out’ in the crowd when you are reliable. Although this may seem like a minor point, such things as being late, not returning phone calls and not giving 110% will hurt you and ultimately help your competitors. To be reliable follow these guidelines:

- * Do what you say you’re going to do
- * Do it when you say you’re going to do it
- * Do it right the first time
- * Get it done on time

And always remember..... Under-promise and Over-deliver

2. Be Responsive.

Responsiveness means being available, accessible and willing to help customers whenever there is a problem. It also means keeping in touch on a regular basis and understanding their wants and needs. To become more responsive make ask yourself these questions:

- * How well do we deliver what we promise?
- * How quickly do we respond to your requests for service?
- *How accessible are we when you need to contact us?

3. Develop Trust and Likability

When you look at the bottom line, there are two ultimate reasons why people will work with you. It's because they like you and they trust you. According to US News and World Report, "Americans are ruder than ever". Simple kindness and good manners can greatly enhance your opportunity to win new clients, generate more business with the ones you have and increase your referrals. To accomplish this follow the 10 commandments of human relations:

1. Speak to people - There is nothing as nice as a cheerful personality
2. Call people by name - The sweetest music to anyone's ears is the sound of his or her name.
3. Have humility - There is something to be learned from every living thing
4. Be friendly - If you would have a friend, be one
5. Be cordial - Speak and act as if everything you do is a pleasure
6. Be sincerely interested in others
7. Be generous with praise and cautious with criticism
8. Give your word - then keep it
9. Be considerate of the feelings of others
10. Be alert to give service - what counts most in life is what we do for others.

4. Watch Your Appearance.

Have you ever heard the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover?” Well guess what everybody does? Although appearances can be deceiving, customers draw a lot of conclusions about the quality of service on the basis of what they see. Your dress, body language, written materials, office, car and verbal skills account for how you are ultimately judged.

A number of studies have shown that body language and tone of voice play an important role in how you are perceived. Even though we may say the “right” words our body language and tone may say something else. For example, if you tell a client you are glad to see them but your tone is not upbeat, your eyes don’t focus on them or you are yawning as you say it you obviously give an impression that you don’t care. To make the right impression SOFTEN your image as follows

- * Smile – In-person and on the phone
- * Open – Be open with your gestures
- * Focus – Keep your attention on the person you are talking to
- * Territory – Don’t get into their space. In American culture the ideal distance to be away from someone is 14 inches to 4 feet.
- * Eye Contact – The key to building rapport is good eye contact. This does not mean staring. The ideal time to keep your eyes on anyone is 3-5 seconds.
- * Nod – Show you are paying attention by nodding. Also practice your nods on the phone to show you care.

5. Be Empathetic

To the extent that you treat someone as special and solve his or her unique problems he/she will continue to be your customer. Disneyland says it best, “We love to entertain Kings and Queens, but the vital thing to remember is this: Every guest receives the VIP treatment ...It’s not just important to be friendly and courteous to the public, it is essential ... At Disneyland we get tired, but never bored, and even if it is a rough day we appear happy. You’ve got to develop a sense of humor and genuine interest in people. If nothing else helps remember that you get paid for smiling.”

Good is not good enough, the bar is being raised, expectations are getting higher and your customers are judging you by their perceptions on how well they are being treated by

your competitors as well as others in the overall marketplace. To stay above the fray and be truly competitive you must be totally customer oriented and follow the above guidelines on a daily basis.

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