



Managers' Market Memo

No. 8 August 2010

Information and suggestions for distribution to your local businesses.

The following comes to you via McKonly and Asbury, a Harrisburg-based accounting firm.

Top Notch Service Is a Must!

Everyone has experienced bad customer service: the rude store clerk, the curt receptionist, the apathetic customer service representative. You could probably offer advice to these people on how to shape up their attitudes. The situation takes on new meaning when it's *your* clients or customers that are being snubbed. And remember, every time a customer or client doesn't come back -- and tells others about a bad experience -- it could mean thousands of dollars that won't end up in your bank account. Here are seven no-no's that encompass the most common reasons for lost business:

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1 Rudeness. Your customer, in a very real sense, is the highest-ranking person you deal with.

2 Broken pledges. If you make a promise, follow through on it. Build a level of trust with your customers by living up to your word.

3 Arguments. The customer is always right...even if you know they're wrong. It's generally better to take the high road and come out smelling like a rose.

4 Indifference. The old "fake it till you make it" adage applies here. If you're having a bad day or couldn't give a hoot about your customers' problems, pretend like you do. By the end of the day, you may find you actually do care.

5 Impatience. If customers ask for help, go out of your way to make sure they're taken care of. Their requests should never be seen as an interruption. They are the very reason you're working at all.

6 Misinformation. One way to turn good customers into ex-customers is by giving the impression that you know the answer when you don't. If you don't know, tell them you'll find out.

7 Gloom and Doom. Nothing turns people off faster than a grumpy, negative attitude. On the other hand, friendliness encourages customers to come back for more and send their friends to you too. Telephone etiquette is especially important. The person answering the phone is usually the customer's first contact with your company.



"Growing up in retail, I have known from the very beginning that the customer is far smarter than the retailer is. When retailers fail, it's because they believe they know what the customer really wants."

- Robert Tillman,
chairman & CEO of Lowe's Companies



Telephone Etiquette 101

Smile on the phone and sound friendly. Callers sense when you're genuinely happy to take their calls.

Make sure employees **give their names**. It's not only personable; it also puts a face on your company.

Show a willingness to take messages and make sure they're delivered.

Follow through on promises.

Thank every caller and end calls with a gracious good-bye.

Do

Let the **phone ring repeatedly**. Try to answer calls within three rings.

Hem and haw. Be quick to offer help.

Ask customers to call back later **without taking a message**.

Put customers on hold, if possible. If you must use hold, ask first, and then thank the caller for holding.

Mumble. Speak clearly and confidently so that callers have the feeling you know what you're doing.

Don't

While these no-no's and phone tips may seem obvious to most of us, we've all come across people who seem to have skipped out on Customer Service 101. Even the smallest impoliteness -- like not getting a "thank you" after a purchase -- can turn customers off and cost your company hundreds, even thousands, of dollars.

And don't forget the grapevine aspect. Customers tell twice as many people about a bad experience as they do a good one. Add to that the fact that it costs as much as six times more to attract a new customer than it does to keep an old one and customer service will shoot to the top of your priority list.