



Improve Your Customer Experience!

I'm known as a stickler for good service. In a sense I'm every sales person's nightmare. Friends say, "Don't sell Jim anything!" Why? Because I always get more than my money's worth. For example: I bought 5 cypress trees from a local landscaper when we built our house. First I only buy from landscapers who guarantee for at least a year. The trees came wrapped (balled) in burlap. They had been grown in clay and our soil is sand. All the watering in the world couldn't save them. They died slowly over the next two months. It took me 7 more months to get the landscaper to make good on them. Finally I settled for a check. I took it bought 5 newer, smaller (less expensive) cypresses and spent the balance on 15 other plants for our yard! I'm thinking of writing a book on how to get more for your money. Still need more convincing? We have a \$150 sofa that we got as a replacement for one our cat "soiled," (we got Sears to pay us back \$850 for the damaged one). I have a \$2500 set of golf clubs I got for \$35.00. I bought my entire Home Theater system as "open box" specials at Circuit City (because they come with a guarantee). I never pay retail for anything. So you can see that price ranks high with me. In the past month I've listened to more business leaders, CEOs and Presidents who say their prime concern is Customer (in the case of Credit Unions, Member) Service. Everybody wants to get the edge, but they have employees who just want a pay check. May a guy who gets a bargain everywhere he goes give some advice? My "Achilles Heel" is Customer Service.

If the person I am doing business with is kind, goes out of their way, gives me special attention or (you guessed it) shows me a better bargain, I'm hooked. Cheap? No, smart. Ask Doug, my insurance agent, or Joe my clothier (notice the first-name basis 'm on with them). I will be willing to spend more for an item if I have a relationship with the sales person or company because trust is so important to me. Even with the recession coming to an end, I still prefer a bargain to extravagance. Give me great customer service and I'm yours for life. But trust has to be earned over time. You don't get mine overnight. Here are six ideas to make your customer service sell and not "smell" and build trust with your clients.

- 1. Take pride in what you do.** It shows. Are you proud of your service or product? Are you convinced that the world is a better place if people are using it? How do your customers feel? Have you ever asked them? (There's a thought.) Pride in workmanship has been said to be a thing of the past. It isn't. I guarantee you that your competitor would benefit from knowing how much you and your staff think of your product or service. It could be used as a selling point against you. I recently encountered an air conditioner repairman who said his work was not done at quitting time, but when I was satisfied with

his service and workmanship. Was I impressed? You bet! He earned the right to do business with me again. Ask your staff what they think of your service if you trust their answers. Better still, ask a trusted customer what they think of your company's image. Ask them why they do business with you. Ask them how you can better serve them. Be ready to adapt to their needs, or someone else will.

2. **Become the leading expert on your customers.** I went out to eat with the President of a financial institution last week in his town. When we went to the restaurant every person on staff seemed to know him. They greeted him as an old friend. They all came by to say "hello." Several "fought" over who would wait on us. When it was time to order, they knew what he wanted. As a result I got great service just for being with him and they got a great tip! Where am I going to eat out next time I'm in town? You better believe it! Even if they don't know me, I know they are likeable people who want to know me. What research do you and your staff do on your customers? Do you study the demographics and then DO something about it? What is your niche audience? How can you provide what they actually need?

3. **Provide more for your customer than your competitors.** I took Angelica, my ten-year old out to lunch the day school ended last May. When a waitress who knows me asked us what we were doing there that day, I happened to mention (in passing) that we were celebrating a good report card. Angelica suddenly became the center of attention in the restaurant. She got great service. They brought out the largest banana split I've ever seen and sang "Congratulations To You," to the tune of the birthday song. John, the man who sang to her said he had never sung "Happy Birthday" that way before and really enjoyed the change. So did Angelica. She thinks, now, that every time we go to that restaurant she will get all the extras. I recently went to a large hotel on a trip and received excellent service from, Frank, a registration clerk. I showed up with the flu. I told him that I just wanted to go to my room and collapse. After about thirty minutes a young girl came to my door from the hotel staff. She was carrying a tray and asked to come into set it down. Frank had sent me a warm bowl of soup, Sprite and water with a Get Well card signed by the entire front desk staff! Frank understands that although he works for a large international chain of hotels, he treats the sign on the hotel above like it was his own hotel. Do your employees feel ownership of the company? Are they working for you, themselves or your customers? (It better be your customers!) Do they see how their image is tied to the company's and your image? Their smile is your corporate smile.

4. **Develop a "connection" with your customers.** Joe Calloway, a customer service trainer and guru, says that he often asks his clients if they believe that it's necessary to have an emotional connection with their customers. "While some of them are surprised at the question, after a bit of thought almost all of them agree that you do need to connect emotionally with customers, especially if your aim is to defy comparison with your competitors. Most people will say that they want their customers to love doing business with them. If ever there was an emotion, surely it's love. It's extremely difficult to get that Category of One status with your customers unless you create a strong emotional connection with them." He's right. If you've ever been to Six Flags Over Georgia, they

have a rule that all employees must wave to the people on the train as it goes by. Ritz Carlton employees greet each guest as they pass in the hallways. Joe says, "It's tiny actions by regular people that create the most powerful force in the business." How does your staff treat your customers/members? Do they treat everyone who walks in your bank, credit union, agency, firm or business as a potential customer? Do they make any type of emotional connection? People love talking about themselves. Do your employees ask customers about their lives? That brings us to...

5. **Learn how to "cross sell" to achieve success.** At McDonalds, if you order a hamburger, what will they ask you? (Hint: It involves Idaho's most predominant product) "Do you want fries with that?" If you connect emotionally with your client, you will be able to ask him/her about their life. As they talk, you will find out needs they have that you can fulfill. Connection brings relationship which leads to expression of needs. Do your people know how to strike up a conversation with someone in your business? Do they know how to ask leading questions that don't require a "yes" or "no" answer. Do they know how to actively listen to others talk? Can they offer other goods and services as a benefit to someone's life? (Important: The drive must be to help the other person, not to make more money. People can see right through a false strategy to get their money.) Employees who tug at the heartstrings of a customer in order to help them with more beneficial service are more important than any fancy brochure or well-furnished building. Tell your people that we are here to make others' lives better through what we do. "How can you make our customers lives better with our service or product?"
6. **Create a WOW! factor.** Find unique ways to serve your client base. What can you do that the competitors aren't doing creatively? I went to graduate school in New Orleans. They have a French word called *lagniappe* (pronounced LAN-yap). Loosely translated it means something extra you didn't pay for or expect. There was a car dealer there who's motto was "Your Lagniappe Dealership." They prized themselves on all the little extras they did for their customers. My friends and I frequented a restaurant up by Lake Ponchartrain that featured a different lagniappe item each night. You didn't know if you were going to get free gumbo, salad, dessert or some other delicious delicacy. Notice I said that we "frequented" the place. Look on dealings with your customers as an experience to enhance. Gifts, expressions of concern, friendly gestures that aren't expected create a WOW factor in the customer's mind and heart. If you assume that your customers are always looking for a better deal somewhere else, you will be driven by a desire to serve them better than your competitors in different ways that are uniquely you.

These are just a few ways to improve service to your customers. Their word of mouth about your service will build a base that no advertising campaign can equal. Gear up your staff to provide the best service available by inspiring them to help others with what you do. Rest assured that if you are not, somebody in competition with you is.

Permission is granted to reprint this article provided the following paragraph is included in full:

Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter,

please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.