

MAKE CUSTOMERS FEEL WELCOME AND YOU'RE HALF-WAY HOME

By John Madden

I walked into one of those instant copier places one day to get a bid on printing a large quantity of seminar booklets for an upcoming workshop. The lady in the shop behind the counter was preoccupied on her computer as I stood before her. Finally she glanced up at me and said: “Yes?” in a manner that suggested I’d obviously ruined her whole train of thought, and my untimely arrival would probably put her further behind in getting her “stuff” done!

Has this happened to you recently? Are you sure *your* people are not treating potential customers with this type of indifference? Many are!

Some famous person said: “You’ll never get a second chance to make a first impression” And a good first impression is half the battle . Needless to say, I didn’t do business with this store due to the grumpiness and lack of interest shown by this employee.

I went to another printer downtown, whose name I’d been given by a business associate. The young lady greeted me with a welcoming smile as soon as I walked in the door, said she’d be right back as she was finishing up

a rush order for another customer; bounced back in a couple of minutes with a cheery apology for my wait, and gave me clear estimates and information. I gave her the project right away. I've been using that same company now for three years.

When you don't get that smile and welcoming attitude, there's an uncanny way of things going wrong. I checked into an upscale hotel in Columbus, Ohio some time ago. No greeting was offered at the front desk. The clerk was obviously overworked and stressed out; he couldn't find my reservation, quoted a higher rate which we both argued about, and sullenly gave me the room key and vague directions to my room.

Would you believe that as soon as I arrived in the room I noticed that little things that normally wouldn't bother me now became serious flaws in the hotel's quality standards! All because of my first unwelcoming experience.

You see, when you get that welcome smile and caring attitude up front, it makes everything after that run more smoothly ... like magic! Here's how you make customers feel welcome and reap immediate - and long term - benefits both for you and your staff:

- Make it part of your company's culture to smile when a customer walks in, or calls on the phone. Everyone feels better, both the customer and the employee! There's a readiness on the customer's part to do business.
- Stand up where possible. It makes the customer feel important.
- Wave at your customer if you're otherwise occupied - to acknowledge her presence.
- Make sure your front line employees are not overburdened with paperwork if you expect them to take care of multiple customers face-to-face, and answer many incoming calls. They'll take care of your customers as you take care of them.
- Don't ask overworked and inexperienced receptionists to screen your calls. They're not able to handle difficult people as well as you can, and they often fight with a potential customer when they don't know what else to do.
- Watch out for customer service overload. Visit and chat with your people.
- Solicit ideas from your employees to make their job run more efficiently.
- Remind yourself and your employees who pays your wages - the CUSTOMER!

- Empower your people to live up to your mission. Make them welcome to come to work and they'll make your customers welcome every time!
- Ask your customers about their first impressions when they call or walk into your business facility. They can't wait to be your advisor, and your loyal customer!

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