

Create Customers for Life!

Providing customer service is more than simply asking your customers how you can help them. It is about developing relationships so you can anticipate their needs and keep them coming back.

Customer service is not a strategy; it is a way of life, whether business is up or down. The customer and how you take care of that customer will ultimately determine whether or not your business will succeed, according to Robert Spector, best-selling author and international speaker best known for his book, *The Mom & Pop Store: How the Unsung Heroes of the American Economy Are Surviving and Thriving*.

It's widely known that word-of-mouth is the most powerful form of advertising. To survive as a company, business owners must ask themselves the following three questions: 1) Are you offering a better product or service than your competitors? 2) Are you offering a less-expensive product or service than your competitors? 3) Are you offering customer service that is superior to that of your competitors?

The key is to think like the customer. Many companies are set up for their own benefit and don't often consider how this philosophy affects the customer.

The management principles of providing customer service should include: Creating an inviting place in person, online and over the phone. Provide your customers with choices of products, services and service channels. Make sure there is clear signage and someone to greet customers when they walk in. Create an easy-to-use website and visit it as if you were a customer. Is it inviting and easily navigable? How does it compare to that of your competitors? When answering the phone, smile and be upbeat.

Sell the relationship. Where businesses succeed is the relationships business

owners and their employees develop. Ask questions to get a measure of who your customers are. "Measure both feet" to get an idea of what the customer really needs. The customer has all the answers; all you have to do is ask. The more you know about them, the better your business and the better your chance of retaining them. It actually strengthens the relationship when a customer sees you are able to rectify a situation. Nurture the relationship with your vendors and suppliers to ensure the ability to continue to offer great products and services to your customers.

Energize your employees. It's better to hire nice, motivated people and teach them how to sell, rather than

hiring salespeople and teaching them to be nice. Hire the smile and train the skill. Who trains them? Their parents or whoever raised them and gave them values. If you have those values, it puts you further ahead of the competition.

Empower employees to take ownership. If there is a bigger cliché than customer service surely it must be empowerment. You empower people by giving them the power or opportunity to make a decision for the company instead of running to a manager.

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...United We Stand