



Trade Talk:

By **Tommy Castellano**
Owner, *Castellano A/C Services*
in Tampa, Florida



Customer Service That Keeps Them Coming Back

Good customer service is the lifeblood of any business. You can offer promotions and cut prices to bring in as many new customers as you want, but unless you can get some of those customers to come back, your business won't be profitable for long.

Good customer service is all about bringing customers back. And about sending them away happy - happy enough to pass positive feedback about your business along to others, who may then try the product or service you offer for themselves and in their turn become repeat customers.

If you're a good salesperson, you can sell anything to anyone once. But it will be your approach to customer service that determines whether or not you'll ever be able to sell that person anything else. The essence of good customer service is forming a relationship with customers - a relationship that the individual customer feels that he would like to pursue.

How do you go about forming such a relationship? By remembering the one true secret of good customer service and acting accordingly; "You will be judged by what you do, not what you say."

I know this verges on the kind of statement that's often seen on a brochure, but providing good customer service IS a simple thing. If you truly want to have good customer service, all you have to do is ensure that your business consistently follows a few rules:

Answer your phone

The first rule of good customer service is that your business phone needs to be answered. Get call forwarding. Or an answering service. Hire staff if you need to. But make sure that someone is picking up the phone when someone calls your business. (Notice I say "someone". People who call want to talk to a live person, not a fake "recorded robot".) And then read *How to Answer the Phone Properly* to make sure that customers calling your business are thrilled with the way the phone is answered at your business rather than put off.

Don't make promises unless you will keep them

This may well be the most important of all of these rules for good customer service. Plan to keep the promises you make. Reliability is one of the keys to any good relationship, and good customer service is no exception. If you say to a customer, "Your new A/C system will be installed on Tuesday", make sure it is installed on Tuesday. Otherwise, don't say it. The same rule applies to client appointments, deadlines, etc.. Think before you give any promise and make them carefully - because nothing annoys customers more than a broken promise.

Listen to your customers

Is there anything more aggravating than telling someone what you want or what your problem is and then discovering that that person hasn't been paying attention and needs to have it explained again? Not from a customer's point of view. Can the sales pitches. If you're truly interested in providing the best customer service, let your customer talk and show him that you are listening by making the appropriate responses. Summarize what the customer has said and suggesting how to solve the problem.

Deal with complaints

No one likes hearing complaints, and many of us have developed a reflex shrug, saying, "You can't please all the people all the time". Maybe not, but if you give the complaint your attention, you may be able to please this one person this one time - and position your business to reap the benefits of good customer service. Properly dealt with, complaints can become opportunities. They give you the chance to discover issues and correct them, thereby improving your customer service. Market research has found that customers who have complained about a product or service and had that complaint successfully dealt with are 70 percent likely to order from the vendor again.

Be helpful - even if there's no immediate profit in it
The other day I popped into a local watch shop be-

cause I had lost the small piece that clips the pieces of my watch band together. When I explained the problem, the proprietor said that he thought he might have one lying around. He found it, attached it to my watch band - and charged me nothing! Where do you think I'll go when I need a new watch band or even a new watch? And how many people do you think I've told this story to?

Train your staff

If you have staff, train them to be always helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable. Do it yourself or hire someone to train them. Talk to your staff about good customer service and what it is. (Good Customer Service: How to Help a Customer explains the basics of ensuring positive staff-customer interactions.)

Take the extra step

Whatever the extra step may be, if you want to provide good customer service, take it. They may not say so to you, but people notice when people make an extra effort and will tell other people. And that good word of mouth will win you more customers.

Throw in something extra

Whether it's a coupon for a future discount, additional information on how to use the product, or a genuine smile, people love to get more than they thought they were getting. And don't think that a gesture has to be large to be effective. A local art framer attaches a package of picture hangers to every picture he frames. A small thing, but so appreciated. Think about your product or service and find something extra that you can offer to customers.

Good Customer Service Pays Big Dividends

If you apply these simple rules consistently, your business will become known for its good customer service. And the best part? Over time good customer service will bring in more new customers than promotions and price slashing ever did!

Until next time
Tommy Castellano