

Friday, February 23, 2007

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

What better customer service? Be a better customer

Denver Business Journal - by [Colleen Stanley](#)

We have great books about "Raving Fans," "Contagious Customer Service" and "Exceeding Customer Expectations." But none address a core issue required for receiving great customer service from vendors and suppliers: Be a good customer.

This sounds like role reversal -- and it is for some companies. But those that get it have been practicing these basic principles for years and receiving stellar service.

Here are seven ways you can improve your score as a customer.

- Write a thank-you note. Yes, I'm talking to you, Mr. Customer. Salespeople write thank-you notes to customers to build relationships -- and honor the good manners learned from their mothers.

How about you, the customer, thanking the exceptional salesperson for their good attitude, willingness to go the extra mile and consistency in performance? Appreciation is one of the oldest and best motivators of people. It doesn't cost anything and reaps big rewards.

When the salesperson is up against a service deadline, guess which customer wins? The customer who has purchased stationery and stamps, and used them.

- Pay your vendors on time. There are plenty of good banks in Colorado that will give your company a line of credit. Quit making vendors your personal bank, which you do when you place their invoices in the 60-to-90-days accounts payable file.

Use some common sense and ask yourself a question: How inspired is a salesperson to give extra effort when your company is always in the 90-day column, and they aren't getting paid their commission?

- Create partnerships.

Take this popular buzzword and put some action behind it. Invite your vendors and suppliers to your national sales meeting, the company Christmas party or a summer barbecue. Blood is thicker than water, so make vendors part of the family. Real relationships are developed when people work hard and play hard. Relationships are the foundation of any great organization.

- Give your salesperson a referral -- before they ask. One of the nicest compliments a salesperson can receive from a customer is a referral.

Sure, salespeople are supposed to ask for referrals. Why not beat them to the punch and surprise your favorite salesperson with a voicemail that says, "Joe, please give Sharon at XYZ Company a call. I spoke with her yesterday and told her about the great things you have done for our organization. She's expecting your call. Good luck. Oh, and Joe, thanks for all you do for us."

- Quit tripping over dimes to save pennies. Make up your mind and make a decision. Do you want exceptional service, expertise and consistent quality of work or average service, expertise and quality?

Stop trying to make your vendors a not-for-profit organization. Companies with great relationships work to create a win for all parties. There is an old saying, "You get what you pay for." When is the last time a person shopped for the cheapest neurosurgeon?

- Be interested. Salespeople understand it's important to know a customer's family, hobby and favorite vacation spots. It's equally important that you ask the same questions of your salesperson.

Never underestimate the power of making someone feel important, special and valued. People always work harder for a boss that has this ability.

Salespeople always work harder for a customer who shows a true interest in them beyond business.

- Don't take great service or extra service for granted. Your salesperson may make jumping through hoops look easy.

In fact, most people have been taught not to brag or self-promote when they have done something out of the ordinary. Pay attention and recognize the extras.

A sales office, after delivering a training program, received a handwritten thank-you note and the book, "The Simple Truths of Service" by Barbara Glanz. Everyone at the office grinned, felt appreciated and decided that jumping through hoops was well worth it.

If you want great customer service, make your salesperson and vendors an integral part of your team. If you want great customer service, be a great customer.

About the Author

Colleen Stanley is president of SalesLeadership Inc., a business development consulting firm specializing in sales and sales management training. The company provides programs in prospecting, referral strategies, consultative sales training, sales management training, and hiring/selection. She is also the author of "Growing Great Sales Teams: Lessons from the Cornfield." Reach Colleen at 303.708.1128 or visit www.salesleadershipdevelopment.com.

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