

BAD SERVICE NULLIFIES ADVERTISING

The American Management Association has found that successful companies spend about 20 percent more money on personnel – including personnel training – than unsuccessful companies do, and that this finding holds true for companies of all sizes in every industry.

All of your company's promotion, advertising, marketing and goodwill can be ruined by a single rude or indifferent employee. Money spent on advertising is largely wasted when customers show up or call and are turned off by employees who lack good manners, long waits on the phone, or lack of knowledge of the product – to name just a few surefire deal killers.

Retailing consultant Richard Israel found that much of a major furniture chain's huge advertising investment evaporated the moment a customer entered a store and walked smack into salespeople with inexcusable behavior.

"The whole purpose of advertising," says Israel, "is to get the customer to come in the front door. After that, advertising can't do anything more for you. It's up to the people in the store to take over during the last four feet."

No! Employees do not arrive on the job with a full-blown set of service skills. Yet most companies believe they are awesome at customer service – and they tend to assume that their employees know from birth what to do for the customers during these last four feet.

I believe companies should allot a portion of their ad budgets to develop learning programs for their employees that will reinforce their advertising with sound customer service knowledge and skills.

Advertising brings customers in the door, all right, but bad customer service sends them right back out the door again. When your organization becomes more human, more remarkable and faster on its feet, you're much more likely to connect positively with your customers,

All businesses have customer-facing experiences every day. Every person in the business must deal with customers in one way or another – including sales people, project managers, cashiers, waitresses and waiters, presidents and vice presidents. And it's these people who will make the difference between a company that is perceived positively and a company that appears not to care.

THE KEYS TO CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

- Listen and solve customer problems fast. Dramatically shorten the time it takes to complete any task for customers and co-workers.
- Give customers your opinion, not a standard "line" read off a piece of paper. They don't want to hear scripted words or one-size-fits-all solutions, they want to hear from a person who's empowered to

make decisions on their behalf.

- Be proactive to find the solutions. Customers look for people to solve a problem, and do it quickly.
- Be reliable. Customers want to feel comfortable dealing with someone they know and can count on to handle a situation.
- Take charge. Customers want professional expertise – someone who can give them guidance and direction.
- Ask customers for feedback and let them know it's important to you. It will make them feel important and that their opinions matter.
- Be an advocate for the customer. Customers are looking for a consultant. They want you to listen to them and provide them with a solution.
- Have a positive attitude. Focus on your customers and on helping them solve their problems.

Employees are proud to work for a company with a president and senior managers who support the need for good service and prove it by providing on-going training. They are proud to work for a company that creates a great working environment and empowers the employees to do what's right for the customers.

It's about communication. If you are going to have a chance to win customer satisfaction you need to know what the customer thinks – your customer. The American Management Association found in a survey that "high-growth companies" stay in touch with their markets and willingly spend the money to do so. They know their customers and keep their knowledge fresh.

They learn things that you cannot learn any other way:

- They learn whether they're satisfied.
- They learn what they bought and what they didn't buy, and why.
- They learn what they came in expecting to buy and to pay.
- They learn preferences and how they are changing over time.
- They communicate this information to every single employee.

Customer service...it's been my life's work and my passion! **RO**

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