Create Customer Passion by Remembering and Using Your Customer’s Name

BY JOHN TSCHOHL

Very few companies remember and use customers’ names. Employees rarely, if ever, remember and consistently use the names and remember the faces of the customer they see most often, let alone the customer they see only occasionally. There is nothing more precious to a customer than their name. It is the highest level of customer service. In a year the typical customer can count on one hand the times an employee will use their name. Most companies and employees don’t care. Few realize the impact it makes on a customer.
This is a stealth approach to keeping customers and stealing customers from your competitors. It is laser surgery. It costs you nothing but the time to train your staff. It is a very effective way to create customer passion.

I can think of only three firms that are good at using my name. Delta Airlines, Amazon and Apple. All three are customer service role models. Why not join their ranks?

Every organization that wants to be a service leader should stress the importance and benefits of remembering customers and includes strategies to help employees do so. When someone calls you by name, whether you realize it or not, you form a bond with that person. Not only is it a sign of respect, customers’ names make those customers feel both welcome and important.

The more valuable the customer, the more important it is. Most companies have technology that has the customer’s name on it. So easy for an employee to say, “Mr. Charles, good afternoon. Thanks for calling. How may I be of help?”

Why don’t we remember and use our customers’ names? There are three simple and easily surmountable obstacles that keep most employees from remembering and using the names of their customers: indifference, fear, and lack of training.

1. **Indifference**
   - When customers enter our place of business in person or by phone, we don’t always think to greet them by name or to show that we remember them. Employees often think of their work as a job or grind that they must “get through,” they don’t invest themselves in the success of the company. Employees may not understand how their actions affect the “big picture” at their company.

2. **Fear**
   - This includes fear of interacting with customers or fear of not pronouncing a name correctly. They see their customers as a necessary part of the job but would rather get through the day with a minimum of interaction. Ask customers to remind you how to pronounce their name. Customers appreciate any effort on your part to remember their names. This only works if you eventually remember the customer’s name and the proper pronunciation.

3. **Lack of Training**
   - Most employers and employees don’t understand the importance of using their customers’ names. This is a skill you can learn and master. All employees should be trained on why and how to remember the customer’s name.

   It’s difficult for a company to differentiate itself with price, product and quality. On the other hand, when you provide superior customer service, which includes remembering your customers and using their names, you set yourself and your organization apart from the competition and increase customer loyalty.

   An employee whose income is based on tips could double their income with this strategy. Visualize if you go to a restaurant and tell the hostess you have a 7 p.m. dinner reservation for four under Nelson. The hostess says, “Mr. Nelson, so nice to have you back. Sidney will take all of you to your table, Mr. Nelson.”

   “Mr. Nelson, my name is Sidney. I will be your server tonight. Would you like something to drink while you look at the menu?” What impres-
When someone calls you by name, whether you realize it or not, you form a bond with that person.

What impression would your guests have? How much would you tip extra?

While most of us don’t have such exceptional memories, we do have at our disposal the tools we need to identify our customers. When a customer hands you her credit card, her name is on it. The same is true for membership cards and reservation forms. It simply is not acceptable to ignore that information.

Most people can easily remember faces but recognizing a face and attaching a name to it takes an entirely difference set of memory skills.

- You will never remember a name if you fail to notice it.
- Recognize and acknowledge customers’ names whether they tell you or you learn it another way. Do not ignore the important information that’s right in front of you.
- When you first hear a customer’s name, repeat it back to him in conversation as soon as possible.

- Add the name to beginning or end of a greeting: “Tasha, how nice to meet you,” or “It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Gainer.”
- Associate the names with something the customers tell you about themselves.
- Write it down. Include the name, a phonetic spelling, any personal details and the subject of your encounter.

When you greet customers and clients by name, you are telling them they are important to you and your organization. And, when customers feel important, they are more likely to return and do business with you again. That repeat business can make the difference between failure and survival. With COVID-19 this skill is more critical than ever. Treat every customer like a king or queen. Remember their face and name and you will create customer passion and loyalty.

MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.

John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with operations in more than 40 countries. The Service Quality Institute (www.customer-service.com) has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. Tschohl’s monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached via Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.