

## CALL CUSTOMERS BY NAME

For most of us, one of the sweetest words we'll ever hear is our name. When someone calls us by name, it connects us, and it's true in any situation. It's especially true when we're making a purchase, whether it's a cup of coffee or a car. The price we're paying is incidental to the quality of the transaction.

However, only a handful of U.S. companies truly understand the power of calling their customers by their names. Three that come to mind are Amazon, Apple, and Delta Air Lines. Yet there's no reason for other companies not to do so, too.

I've found there are three main reasons employees don't use customers' names. First is fear – they're afraid they'll mispronounce the name. Second is indifference – they tell themselves it isn't important, and that they're too busy to bother learning and using the customers' names. Third is a lack of training – they don't grasp how important it is to use customers' names, and they don't have the tools they need to do so.

You can help by training your employees, and by including role-playing scenarios in the training. When they meet a customer for the first time, an employee should smile and introduce him/herself by saying, "Good, afternoon. I'm Charlie, and I'll be helping you today. What's your name?" As Charlie continues to talk with the customer, he should use the customer's name in the conversation, to cement it in his mind.

If you're greeting a return customer whose name you remember, you can say, "It's nice to see you again, John. What can I help you with today?" It's also important to use the customer's name when they pay for their purchase. Most people pay with a credit card – you can look at the name on the card and thank them, "John, thanks for your patronage. I hope to see you again soon."

When your employees greet your loyal customers by their names, it makes the customers feel valued and it increases their loyalty to your business. It also differentiates your business from your competitors, something that's of increasing importance, given the state of the economy today.

Let's say you own a restaurant. It isn't unusual for your customers

to have at least 10 restaurants within a one-mile radius, which means they'll have several choices when dining out. The deciding factors for your customers will probably include the quality of the food, the price, and the service – and employees who address the customers by name.

Far too often, customers feel as though they're being treated as numbers. The last time you checked in for a flight, did the airline agent hand you your boarding pass and thank you by name? It's a simple thing to do, since your name is printed on the ticket. The same is true when you go through security. You're required to present your identification, yet no one calls you by name.

I've been flying around the world for more than 45 years, usually in business class. I spend approximately \$200,000 a year for those flights, yet I can recall only four times when the lead flight attendant called me by my name, which was readily available with a glance at the passenger manifest.

On the other hand, on a flight from Germany to the U.S. on Delta Air Lines, the captain came out of the cockpit, stopped by my seat, addressed me by name, and chatted for a few minutes. It was the first and only time it ever happened, and it made me feel important and valued.

Using a customer's name adds a personal touch to the service you're providing. It gives you a competitive advantage, and it doesn't cost you anything. When you use customers' names, you're showing them respect and letting them know you value them.

For more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, visit [www.customer-service.com](http://www.customer-service.com).

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