

The gift that keeps on giving — well-trained, empowered employees

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For The New Mexican

There is nothing that gives a manager greater satisfaction than seeing an employee take care of a work-related problem efficiently and effectively.

But when managers are looking to hire new employees, they say with utmost honesty that people with these skills are rarely found. Few people are born with the expertise needed to survive the high demands of today's business world.

For the most part, employees who can take care of problems in an effective manner have been well trained and cultivated. Later, they have become empowered to do the next right thing as it relates to the business and the customers.

Recently, a commentary in *The New Mexican* highlighted the fact that a telephone company had decided to terminate the contracts of their most problematic customers. The

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author of the article emphasized that a few customers can drain the resources of a company with constant complaining.

I agree that it is important to quickly identify which customers are a good fit for your company.

First, in order to determine the suitability of that fit, your organization needs to have a clear picture of what it does and who it serves.

Too many times a business tries to be all things to all people, and it fails miserably to be unique or, even worse, it fails to meet minimum customer standards.

Many small businesses evolve over time because they maintain a close relationship with their customers. These businesses strive to keep their finger on the pulse of customer needs and the changes demanded by those customers.

Learning how to balance the needs of a customer with the needs of the business is not a science, it is an art. This art

requires employees who know how to deal with people with tact and respect.

Businesses should record all complaints to determine if the complaint is an isolated issue or if it is becoming part of a trend.

If you find this is a trend, then your ability to make changes quickly can help you stay ahead of your competition. Often, when companies lose their customer connection they end up forced to pay high consulting, surveying and focus-group fees to find out what their customers think and want.

A smart business constantly tracks feedback in all of its forms from complaints to surveys. And a smart business is one that understands that employees who are able to deal with customer-satisfaction issues are rarely born with such skills.

These employees have been trained and educated in how to successfully communicate with customers so they can either resolve a customer problem or, if necessary, terminate relationships that are not mutually

beneficial. Employees must positively and graciously know how to show the mismatched customer the way out.

Investing in developing these skills in your employees will pay dividends as your satisfied-customer base grows and you weed out those who are not happy in a timely manner.

I recommend businesses frequently evaluate their customer base to ensure high levels of satisfaction. We know that, on average, a disgruntled, mismatched customer will tell at least 26 people about their dissatisfaction. No business needs this kind of negative advertising. A dissatisfied customer is a huge liability to your company.

Ultimately, both you and your customer will be better off the sooner you end the relationship.

Employees need to be sensitive to the signals of an unhappy mismatched customer. Here are a few symptoms:

- ◆ Complaining about your prices or your quality.
- ◆ Telling you they have complained about this same issue before.

◆ Comparing you to another company that offers the same service or products.

◆ Insisting they can get a better deal somewhere else.

A highly trained employee can spot the chronic complainer or the problematic or bad-fit customer by listening carefully.

Your employee might resolve the concern by offering the following statement: "We value you as a customer and we want you to be satisfied. If we are failing to meet your expectations, we understand if you are forced to take your business elsewhere."

This statement, voiced with legitimate concern and empathy, allows your customer to leave the business with his or her pride intact and your employees can breathe a sigh of relief as you weed out customers who are simply not a good fit for your organization.



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