

## BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY USING EVERYDAY COMMON SENSE

By Karin K. Schaff Glazier

Gaining and maintaining customer loyalty is critical to ensuring healthy, long-term customer relationships. Unfortunately, all too often we forget the small stuff! Don't let loyalty fall to the way-side. Keep it alive and integrate it into your corporate culture and personal value system. Here are some easy and proven ways to gain and maintain a healthy level of customer loyalty:

1. **See your clients as people, not just as a business opportunity.** Create "personal" files that contain information such as their birthdays, special anniversaries, how many kids they have with their ages and names, spouse's name and profession, where they like to vacation, food and beverage likes and dislikes, and a listing of their core internal team that offers support and direction (i.e., names of their assistants, managers, VPs, secretary, etc.). The more you know about your clients, the more personal touches you can make to show you care, not just about their business, but about them as people. Be sure to act on this information as well. For example, send cards out for birthdays and holidays, congratulate them on their children's graduation, send a note welcoming them back from their vacation and asking how it was, etc.
2. **It's a two-way street.** Get to know your clients' business inside and out by asking them about their product, services, culture, values, expectations, ambitions, etc. Typically when vendors are pitching their wares to a customer, they focus more on all their "great stuff," not enough on their audience's "great stuff." Well, great stuff is good to have; however, don't forget great stuff is only as good as the need it satisfies. The better you understand that need, the better you can position your "stuff" to provide a truly beneficial solution.
3. **Be considerate of your clients' time.** Here are some simple tips on how to show your consideration: hold off on contacting clients when you know it is a busy time of the day or week for them (unless it's absolutely necessary). If you are looking for approval on something, give them adequate time to review the information. Don't be late for meetings, and don't just "pop over" to say hi in person unless you pre-announce your arrival (this can be viewed as intrusive).
4. **Give away a little when you can afford to.** Yes, we are all in business to make a living; however, when possible show you care more about them than their money by giving away a little when possible. This helps to show you are doing whatever you can to satisfy their needs (within reason, of course!). This shows *your* loyalty to the client!
5. **Be your client's advocate within your own company.** If a client requests something or has an issue that needs attention and resolution, go to bat for the client if it makes business sense and if the client has a legitimate request/concern. When both parties have a responsibility to the situation and if both contribute to the resolution, you should learn to compromise. Compromising can go a long way if done with the best intentions.

Even though there are no guarantees in business, using simple common sense to increase the probability of securing client loyalty is a small but vital way to provide unforgettable personalized service and support. Unfortunately, in this crazy, fast-paced world we live in, we forget the small things that can make all the difference, both professionally and personally. Take a step back every once in a while and ask yourself, "How would I like to be treated?" This will help you add the "human element" to your daily business activities.

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