

"The next thing I did was call a meeting of all supervisory personnel and explain the incident to them. Then I showed them what a customer is really worth. Once I got these people to see that a customer is not to be valued on a single sale but rather on an annual basis, customer service definitely improved."

The point made by the retailing executive applies to any kind of business. It's repeat business that makes the profit. Often, there's no profit at all on the first several sales. Look at the potential expenditures of the customers, not just what they buy today.

Putting a big value on customers is what converts them into big, regular patrons. Attaching little value to customers sends them elsewhere. A student related this pertinent incident to me, explaining why he'll never again eat in a certain cafeteria.

"For lunch one day," the student began, "I decided to try a new cafeteria that had just opened a couple of weeks before. Nickels and dimes are pretty important to me right now, so I watch what I buy pretty closely. Walking past the meat section I saw some turkey and dressing that looked pretty good, and it was plainly marked 39 cents.

"When I got to the cash register, the checker looked at my tray and said, '1.09.' I politely asked her to check it again because my tally was 99 cents. After giving me a mean glare, she recounted. The difference turned out to be the turkey. She had charged me 49 cents instead of 39 cents. Then I called her attention to the sign, which read 39 cents.

"This really set her off! 'I don't care what that sign says. It's supposed to be 49 cents. See. Here's my price list for today. Somebody back there made a mistake. You'll have to pay the 49 cents.'