Be a good neighbor: Community awareness = customer service

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As a small business owner your connection with your community can be your #1 key to success. You should strive on a daily basis to make yourself aware of the needs within your community. While this does not mean becoming a “non-profit” business, it means extending your hand to help those in distress.

The identity of a community is based around the private business owner that supplies character to the community. As part of that identity it is important that you are more than the business down the street. You need to be the business that cares. By becoming a concerned citizen and good neighbor you tell your customer base that you are there for them. There are some steps you can take to make sure you are aware of what is going on in the community.

1. **Become a member of the community** – join an organization of local business owners that is aimed at community service such as the Rotary society.
2. **Sponsor local activities** - Get involved with the local sports teams such as the high school sports.
3. **Offer discount programs for members of local organizations** – by offering a discount to members of local services and charities you express your support of what they do for the community.
4. **Read the paper** – often there are local interest stories in the paper, such as families that have lost their home or a loved one. By reaching out to these individuals you show that you care. You may want to offer them a discount on products they need or supply them with items that you carry that may help them in their time of need. Not only is this good community relations but it is also usually tax deductable.
5. **Get to know the fellow business owners around you** – by integrating with the small business owners in the community you create a customer base from these fellow business owners, and you can also do joint community fundraiser projects for a particular need, such as a golf tournament for a cancer victim.



1. **Show up at local festivals and events** – By sponsoring local festivals you show that you are part of the community and this may also give you exposure to members of the community that may not be aware you existed or wanted to do business with you but have never stopped by or called.
2. **Attend city council meetings** – Not only will this keep you up to date on local regulations and events that may affect your business, but you will also be expressing to the leaders of the community that you are a concerned member of the community.

By becoming a concerned member of the community you are taking your business beyond the four walls of your store or office and directly into the lives of the people that you count on for business. By being aware of the lives of those in your community you do more for your business than any advertising campaign or customer service program could ever do.