

Title:

Customer Loyalty - The Key to Business Success

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Summary:

Talk to many business people about how they approach customer service and the majority of them will say that they are aiming to have 'satisfied' customers. No! What we all should be seeking is to have loyal customers. But how can you turn a satisfied customer into a loyal one?

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Article Body:

Talk to many business people about how they approach customer service and the majority of them will say that they are aiming to have 'satisfied' customers. No! What we all should be seeking is to have loyal customers.

Research has shown that 65% of customers say they are loyal. You may be happy with this but you shouldn't! Satisfied customers are in a state of nothing - they are neither dissatisfied or happy; they are in between. They will tolerate you while you are of use to them but if a better deal comes along, they're off.

On the other hand, loyal customers are your friends. They will be with you through thick and thin; they will be the first to try out your new product; they will give you honest feedback; they will regularly refer business to you. This is what you want! But how can you turn a satisfied customer into a loyal one?

Let Them Decide How to Do Business With You

Today customers are a lot more sophisticated in how they want to do business. If your product or service lends itself to be offered via a number of different means, then give your customer the option.

Can you deliver face-to-face? What about telephone services? Could you make use of SMS texts for quick notes and reminders? Do you have a web site through which customers can contact you or even make orders on-line? If you provide a variety of delivery channels which are available to suit the customer's needs then they

are more likely to stay with you.

Build a Relationship

Loyalty can only be achieved if you have a true relationship with your customer. Aim to build rapport. Understand who are dealing with you and understand what they are looking for. Keep in regular contact with them; you don't necessarily have to be selling something. Always use their names, especially their first name if you can.

All of this will help in building a long term relationship. Once you have this, they are less likely to walk away.

Generate Staff Loyalty

How can you cultivate a loyal customer if your staff are not loyal to the business? You must have staff who care for the job and will do anything to protect and move the business forward. Customers will be more loyal if they see familiar faces. A business with a high staff turnover will find it difficult to build a relationship with their customers.

Treat your staff well. Reward their successes and recognise their achievements. Hold regular training sessions so they feel they are learning and developing. An established training programme will also make sure that their product knowledge is up to date.

Seek Out Complaints

This sound strange but the average customer has to be encouraged to complain! Many will keep quiet about poor service but if they can find someone else to do their business with, they will. Set up a clear complaints procedure so customers can complain if they wish. Provide staff with the tools to effectively deal with customer problems. Follow up all complaints to ensure that they have been resolved.

Take an Interest

Show your customers that you are interested in their views. Run regular surveys to find out what they think of your service, to find out what you can do differently. You can either carry out a survey over the telephone, or go as far as doing a mailing to all your customers.

Taking the trouble to contact your customers will reinforce the message that you want their custom. But don't forget - take action on what you find out!

Be a 'Can Do' Business

Customers like nothing better than a business which delivers on even the most difficult of requests. 'Can Do' businesses will always have loyal customers. Train your staff to never use words like, "Sorry but ...", "It's not my fault", "Its company policy".

Be a business where solutions are always looked for and problems seen as challenges.

Look After The 'Golden' Customers

The old 80/20 is likely to apply to your business - 80% of your sales or profits are likely to come from just 20% of your customers. Work out who your top 20% are and love them to death! Why not concentrate on turning the remaining 80% into loyal customers? Well, the 20% have already shown that they trust and respect you. A little more effort with these customers will reap more business than concentrating on the 'maybe's'. By all means, run a programme to convert the 'maybe's' but put more effort into the converted.

So, there you have it. Some ideas and tips on how to build and keep loyal customers. Take a critical look at your business and put a loyalty building programme in place, which will boost sales and profits.