

Title:

Sure Fire Ways To Drive Customers Away!

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Summary:

Stop driving away your customers or members and learn about what we should all know about "relationships".

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Article Body:

Call it a blind spot. Call it regimented thinking. Call it the-way-we-have-always-done-it. But by any name, there are actions and practices that far too many businesses engage in that can unknowingly drive customers away.

When I observe such practices, I move from being angry to just plain sad. Really sad. Because the truth of the matter is that no one CONSCIOUSLY set out to ruin my day. No one sat in a board room and dreamt up procedures that would have us leaving in droves. No one woke up and said, "I can hardly wait to make you miserable." It happened "because". Because the truth of the matter is that it takes courage to stop and ask the critical question: Does this serve our customer? Our member? Our community?

We all "know" the rules of service. But sadly, sometimes we don't take the time to think through just what our actions might be do or say to the customer. Here are some actions guaranteed to drive folks from the doors of an enterprise. It's time for all of us to sit up and notice!

Over promise and under deliver.

Bring people to the conference with the promise of cutting edge material. Lure attendees into thinking that the hotel is a four-star marvel. Tell customers that they'll have all the material they need in three days. Promise the meeting planner that the press kit will go out overnight. Then sit back and watch. Really watch. If it isn't true 100% of the time, it's a bait and switch promise.

Take the idea of "cutting edge material". I've attended conferences in which the

only cutting edge was the serving knife on a buffet table. Same ideas. Same methodology. Same format. Get a clue! Shake it up. Be provocative. If we say it, we better deliver.

How about that four-star hotel? Brochure looks great. The conference walk through is stunning. But then, could that ghastly-looking luncheon plate REALLY be the same chicken marsala you were served in the tasting? And, how about the fact that the hotel "forgot" to tell you that the major dining room would be undergoing renovation. Yikes!

The three-day guarantee. If you can't deliver it all the time, it's not true! Now, perhaps Three Day Blinds has reversed its practices, but years ago, I ordered window coverings for our new house. My mother was coming to visit us over Christmas and I needed shades. Alas, the third day came and went. I discovered that only "some" shades are three-day, not all. Beware of the implied promise.

Never walk the talk.

The brochure for the conference said, "a celebration of members", a "community that listens." Too bad it didn't play out in reality.

The setting is New Orleans. A couple thousand folks have gathered for the "celebration" and the "community". Alas, the reality is another fact. I discover that people are invited to parties based upon their status in the organization. The luncheon session I am addressing has some 50 "important people" file into the banquet hall and take their places on a stage that is three tiers deep. Talk about a "we"/ "they" set up. I am told, "This is the way we have always done it." The intent to "honor" these 50 people was to have hundreds watch them eat and to also set up the boundary between the "us" and the "them".

Come on. There are a few more creative ways to showcase the "us" that is far more inclusive, educational, and community building than a camera shot of folks eating. I end up addressing an audience while have my back to 50 plus people. It's rude, off-putting, and the exact opposite of what the organization, in all good intentions, wishes to create.

Our lives had better mirror the words we use and the beliefs we profess to all. Otherwise, we're merely impersonators. I watched a very well known speaker who specializes in relationship building turn into a snarling, demanding customer who treated the flight attendants like personal servants. How many disbelievers were created on that day?

Make technology your primary form of communication.

Make sure there's a voice mail doom loop from which someone will never emerge to actually speak with a live human. Conduct all business via e-mail, assuming that a message sent is a message received. And while you're at it, hit send as soon as a message is written.

These three practices can doom any business relationship. Amazing isn't it: having a person answer the phone can actually be a competitive advantage! How easy do we make it for people to do business with us via the telephone or even our web site? I tried to book a reservation in a lovely hotel, only to be treated to a lovely online tour of the property without ever finding a contact number!

E-mail is great for data but not perfect for relationship building or critical pieces of information. In fact, often the E in e-mail stands for escalation and error. Two colleagues almost became bitter enemies over rapid fire e-mails that had the sting of a viper and the warmth of the Arctic. Neither thought to pick up the phone and talk things out. Thus, the lop-sided "chats" turned into internecine warfare. Talk about beating folks up!!

I discovered fascinating information about a client when we talked through my normal pre-program survey rather than depend upon an electronic transmission. I had thought my online survey was a time saving device. Instead, what it became was a gatekeeper, preventing me from digging deeper into an issue. Likewise, multiple choice answers on written or online customer service surveys will never result in information of substantive depth.

Forget the wisdom of the outer circle.

In organizational life, there's always an "inner circle" of power and control. Boards of Directors wield it. So do powerful departments. When practices and policies come only from the inner circle, the rank and file is not only unheard, but can turn its back on the organization. Members leave associations when they feel discounted and "not in the know". Never say "thank you".

Mother was right when she made us kids write notes to relatives after Christmas. It's a forgotten habit that can go a long way to letting people feel appreciated. Likewise, pick up the phone and call a client or member who has a complaint and THANK THEM for making that complaint known. You'll discover a huge dividend in goodwill after they recover from the shock of your call.

Three Practices to KEEP customers and members.

Common courtesy isn't common. Be uncommon.

Service is an unnatural act. It takes emphasis away from ourselves and gives it to others. Be unnatural.

Time is the only non-renewal resource. Never waste people's time.

Hope I haven't wasted yours!

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