



Why Do Your Customers Keep Coming Back? A Tale of Two Competitors ...

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Internal Customers Are As Important As External Customers

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Quality in a service or product is not what you put into it. It is what the client or customer gets out of it.

– Peter Drucker



Why Do Your Customers Keep Coming Back? A Tale of Two Competitors ...

I used to have two favorite restaurants. Now, I only go back to one of them. The reason why is simple ... outstanding customer service!

What did the other restaurant do to turn me away? We've all experienced this before so I'll keep it short. No one would say hello or smile at me when I walked in. I would wait unusually long to be seated when they were not even busy. The people servicing me were unpleasant. My order was usually wrong and my food was cold. That was just the beginning of it.

Let me tell you more about my new favorite restaurant. The very first time I went there, my food was awful. I am not the type of person to complain and point that sort of thing out because it makes me uncomfortable. I'd rather say nothing at all. When the waitress returned and noticed I had not touched much of my portion, she asked me if everything was okay (wow!). I told her I didn't like it, but that it was okay, because that's just how I handle those types of situations. She immediately responded with, "What else would you like to try? Your meal is on us." I began to wonder if this was really happening.

Several weeks later I returned to this restaurant because of that waitress. I was enjoying a wonderful meal, and saving my succulent crab leg claw for the very end. To my dismay, I cracked open the shell, and there was no meat! Jokingly when the waiter returned I told him and I laughed it off, because this was no one's fault. A few minutes later he returned with a plate of crab legs, and said, "Don't worry, they are on us." Okay, this can't be!

A week later I returned with a group of friends. (Notice how quickly and frequent my trips are becoming?) My friend received the wrong drink, and the waitress returned with the correct one, on the house. Our meals arrived and they looked perfect to me. The manager walked out behind the waitress, with a lobster tail. He explained to my friend that he is giving her an EXTRA lobster tail, because the staff felt that when the first one was butterflied that it did not look "nice." As they walked away, I began to share my first two experiences with my table. We sat in disbelief because it is



not often anymore that we are so impressed with customer loyalty.

It wasn't about the free stuff. It was about the service, the attention to detail without asking for it. Whenever I go to this restaurant, I don't feel like just another number, I feel like a customer. What do you do to make your customers feel important, and keep them coming back?

By the way, I'll be going back again this weekend. 

By Melissa Frantz

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Customer Loyalty or Where Did All the Customers Go?

We keep reading that there is no more loyalty—customer or otherwise. The worker complains the employer will no longer guarantee job security. The employer claims he trains employees so well they start their own businesses and become the competition. The manufacturer claims the consumer buys only on price. The consumer says they would buy brand but the value is not there.

There is a dynamic missing in each of the above statements. The dynamic only goes in one direction.

To build a relationship—especially a strong one involving loyalty—is a two way street. If your business has few loyal customers or clients then you will have few repeat buyers. Most businesses either make it or break it with repeat customers.

That pizza company calling you for a phone survey is not interested so much in the ten bucks you spent last week as the \$7000 you will spend in the next 25 years.

So it makes sense that if your business has few loyal customers you need to figure out a way to not only get them but keep them. Simple.

The way to do that is to totally focus on the customer; not just in the sales and marketing meetings. But in everything you do. Inside out. When you look outside first to your market and customer base and then change the way your business operates to meet those market demands you are reengineering processes.

With this refocus employees must be hired who understand the importance of customer loyalty. To keep them motivated incentive plans should reward employees for retaining regular customers as well as gaining new ones.

Tools and training allow skilled employees to resolve customer complaints very quickly. Most consumers understand that no business can always be perfect. By handling problems quickly and effectively your customers understand very clearly your commitment to them.

Attitude must be honed with other skills. Positive, upbeat employees are liked then trusted then bought from. You cannot expect depressed employees to keep customers happy.

Measure and survey what your customers do, say and pay for. If your product/service is higher priced follow up regularly to insure satisfaction. The very act of following up strengthens long term relationships.

Establish personal relationships with your customers. This distinguishes you from the competition and makes it harder for your customer to “jump ship.” Allow employees to be real people—let their personalities come through to establish a bond.

Canned “smiling service” is actually perceived as insincere and contrived. Research has shown we actually use different facial muscles in a genuine smile than in a faked one. Strive to be genuine.

Exceed those customer expectations and they will remember you each and every time they need your product or service. Remember that if you cannot distinguish yourself they will buy on price alone.

Updated problem solving and decision making skills are a must. Employees must not be afraid to make a tough decision. Customers have a sense that if an employee is truly trusted by the company to resolve a concern then the company will make it right if that decision turns out to be a mistake.

The customer is a fickle animal. We may not be impressed when the cashier calls us by our last name after running the credit card through the machine. We may even get to the point where we can expect that. What surprises us is that which goes beyond our sense of expectation.

When someone in a business context does something for us we do not expect we just stand there with our jaws dropped. We have been transformed by an experience which transcends the business simplicity of supply and demand. We have been zapped by a thunderbolt and may never be the same.

Your business or employer may be very good at customer focus. If so, you may develop the most valuable of all business assets—“the loyal customer.” If you don’t have that loyal customer feeling then maybe you are focusing too much on self-introspection.

Your business may in time discover that you really aren’t all that bad from an internal view. But customers are external. And maybe the time is right for shifting the focus where it really needs to be.

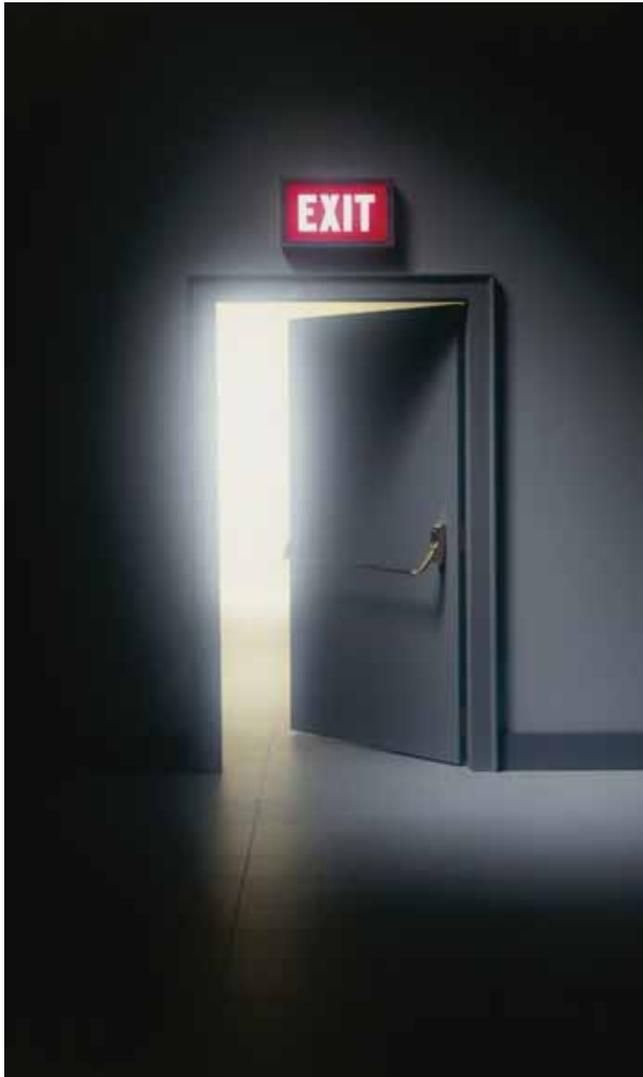
Maybe you need to “reengineer” or reorganize. Or maybe just tweak your strategy here and there. But whatever you do focus on your customer to gain their loyalty. 

By Jack Deal

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Internal Customers Are As Important As External Customers



I am currently reading a book called, *Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time*, by Kevin Eikenberry and so far I am impressed with its material. I have gathered many tips that can be used in meetings, focus groups and daily office activities. One area that was of particular interest was the section on customer service—especially when it discussed customers in the nontraditional sense. People tend to forget that anyone that uses a product they produce is a customer—internal or external. Not treating a customer like a customer is the first step down a road towards creating an adversarial relationship.

Today's professionals have to realize that they are just as accountable to their internal customers as they are to the traditional ones. Alienating your internal customers results in a soured opinion of not only the individual, but the entire staff of the offender. Human resources is a perfect example of an element of businesses that has many internal customers that they work with. Their customers include managers, executives and every other employee. Treating every customer with respect, professionalism, and courtesy is paramount to establishing relationships and an excellent reputation.

Kevin Eikenberry quotes a book called *Extreme Management* by Mark Stevens saying that "Happy customers tell four to five others about their positive experience". Dissatisfied customers tell nine to twelve how bad it was." When an internal customer tells nine fellow employees how bad they were treated by human resources it will not take long for the entire organization to know about the incident. These types of occurrences quickly sour the opinion of the entire organization despite what the satisfied customers say.

Every leader needs to ensure that their people appreciate that customer service matters to even the internal customers. People expect respect, professionalism, and understanding when working with co-workers. If leaders allow their employees to alienate one another they are failing as leaders—it will not be long before the quality employees of an infected organization start walking out the door. 

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