

Attitudes and Customer Service

Several years ago I attended a Conference and it was there I heard a story that I have not been able to let go of. In fact, it has become a guiding principle in the way I try to conduct my business each and everyday.

A very prominent retail chain owner recalled an experience in his youth that had a profound impact on his life and on his future retail success. He started his story by telling us that when he graduated from college he couldn't find work in his field but had been hired by the local post office. He said that from the very first day he started his job he hated it. He said the last thing he ever thought he would be doing was selling stamps and that frankly it was the most boring product in the world. He recalled going to work in a bad mood almost everyday and said he probably did not smile his entire shift. The only thing on his mind was getting out of there as fast as possible. He said he did his work and went home hoping there would be an interview request for another job.

Eventually, he did find work in his field and had given his superiors notice. He remembered that on his last day at the post office he was the happiest man alive. He felt that he would finally be doing what he wanted and he just couldn't hide his excitement and happiness. He said that he had grinned all day long.

It was on this very last day that an elderly lady walked into the post office and asked to purchase some stamps. He said that he happily filled her order, thanking her for her business and wishing her a wonderful day. He said that the elderly lady looked at him and said "son I want to thank you for everything you have done for me today". He replied "But, the only thing I did was sell you a stamp Madame".

He then proceeded to tell us that the woman said that coming to the post office that day was one of the hardest things she had ever had to do in her entire life. She said that just yesterday she found out her daughter was dying of cancer. She went on to say that she was on a small pension and could not afford to be with her daughter so last night she sat down and wrote her a letter to tell her that she loved her and even though she could not be by her side she would pray for her every night. The elderly lady then thanked him for all of his help and for his kindness and went on her way.

The speaker told us that for the first time in 2 years he realized that his job was not about selling silly stamps. He never knew how much a stamp could mean to someone until this woman told him her story. He said that for a minute he was sad because he never took his job seriously or really even cared about what he was

doing. He finally understood how important his job really was. Because, what ever he did that day meant the world to a lady whose daughter was dying and the only thing he had done was be happy because it was his last day. His happiness translated into something much more to this woman and it was with this experience he finally understood that it was his attitude that could make a huge impact on another person be it for the negative or the positive.

This story made a huge impact on me. After hearing this I thought about how it applied to my business. I thought about my customers and their lives. In today's world we all live very busy lives. Many men and woman must juggle family, work, volunteer initiatives, sports and social obligations. It seems that often the day is by far too short to accomplish all of the tasks we have set out to do. People are stressed and very busy and the last thing they need is more stress.

How does this apply to my business? Well I know that the one thing that I can do in my retail establishment is not add extra stress to my customers lives. Each and every time a customer walks thru the door they should be greeted with a genuine smile and not a look that implies they have interrupted something. Their shopping experience should be pleasant whether that means letting your customer step out of their busy world into your store for some peace while they browse your products or helping them find exactly what they need at your store or somewhere else as efficiently as possible. It is about taking a sincere and genuine interest in your customer. It is about being nice when the customer is buying something and being equally as nice when they are returning something. It is about creating a retail experience that is second to none.

As retailers, it is our job to create an environment that is welcoming, helpful and genuine. We should attempt to create an experience that is tailored to fit the needs of each and every one of our customers individually. We all have bad days and bad experiences but we really should not take them out on other people. We must consciously treat each encounter we have as though it is the single most important encounter we have had that day.

I feel that I have a responsibility to my customers to make their experience in my store as pleasant as possible each and every time they call or visit my business. I am not saying that we can please every one all of the time, because, that may very well be impossible. However, what I am saying is to be conscious of your attitude and the way you treat people. You may not realize that your actions and reactions may have a profound impact on another person's life. Treat people the way you want to be treated and what goes around comes around may very well be the two key ingredients to great customer service and a successful retail business.