

Customer Service Can Make or Break a Business

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Over the past year, I've done a lot of traveling and noticed how various businesses either show great, average, or poor customer service. Now that we have the internet and social media, deficiencies in a business can be seen by the whole world. Let me list some examples that I have noticed during the past year or so.

During July and August, 2013, I traveled to N. Dakota to research the Bakken Oil Boom. I gave 12 seminars, including two each at the Minot and Williston Libraries and three at the Bakken Oil Service Expo at the ND State Fairgrounds in Minot. At the Minot library, they put notices of my free seminars in their monthly calendar. In addition, they created bookmarks that contained information of these two seminars at the front desk, where people check out their books. These were great advertising pieces, as people would take them and use them. The Williston Library did put up flyers, but did not do all that the Minot Library did. Partly because of the difference in the marketing effort, the two seminars at the Minot Public Library were full, but almost no one came to the Williston Library seminars.

In early November, 2013, I was flown by a large financial company to attend a financial conference at a famous hotel in Key Biscayne, Florida. This is an extremely expensive area, where individual houses can sell for \$20 million. The hotel chain has an international reputation for tremendous service. I was shocked to find that at least four people at the concierge desk did not know much about major tourist attractions. When I asked about the nearby Aquarium and Killer Whale show, they had never attended. If I had been the owner of this Florida hotel, I would have insisted that everyone at the concierge desk attend each of the 5-10 major tourist attractions at least once, even if the hotel had to pay their admission ticket. When guests pay \$400-600 plus a night for a room, they expect more. Thank goodness I was not paying for the hotel stay.

Finally, I want to mention what happened to a close friend Debbie in the Tempe, AZ area. She had been shopping at Costco at 1445 W. Elliot Road and had purchased \$300 plus of groceries on a Sunday in July, 2014. Her battery died and she was stuck. It was over 100 degrees and the butter was melting. Costco sells batteries, but the normal policy is to NOT install them. However, Hugo Manrique Morales, one of the service technicians, rolled the battery a long way to her car and did install the battery. When I found out about this, she wrote a thank you card and I slipped a \$20 bill inside. I delivered it to the manager Josh Wozniak. A day later, I got a phone call from Hugo stating that company policy does not allow him to receive any cash. So, I stopped by and thanked him personally; he gave me back the \$20; but kept her thank you card. You imagine that Debbie will become a lifelong customer and tell lots of people about this "WOW" customer service.

Conclusion: A greatly under-estimated part of the success or failure of any business depends on how knowledgeable and motivated the employees are. Great customer service makes you stand out; the public enjoys the experience; they buy more and come back. Or, if it's a library, they come more often and vote for your next bond issue request. Customer service studies find that if someone is happy, they may tell 3 friends; but if really unhappy, they tell 27 others. Unhappy customers can't wait to tell others about bad service.

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