

Article This Issue:

BUILDING LOYAL  
CUSTOMERS: From Contact to  
DeliveryLOOK IN THE MIRROR:  
And Check Your Attitude

# MetaManagement Communicator

MetaMatrix Consulting Group, LLC.  
Consulting & Speaking Services

Information created to inform, educate and prepare management to lead

## BUILDING LOYAL CUSTOMERS: From Contact to Delivery

Getting customers to trust your firm is the name of the game. In fact, after money and desire, all purchases are about trust. When you enter a store or go online and purchase a shirt from JCPenney or a book from Barnes & Noble, you are placing value on the item and trust in the firm. Firms that carry or create a trusted name or "brands" use the relationship of trust to develop more trust in a win-win situation and a stream of long-term business.

The same holds true in B2B as C2B as Boeing might use GE or Rolls Royce engines to differentiate them from the pack, just as you might purchase a software program from Microsoft or Oracle over a no-name contender.

If trust is so important, then as management, our eyes must be keenly focused on what develops trust. The starting points are various: a healthcare provider offering senior citizen housing might find their next customer via a referral from another satisfied family; no advertising could close the sale the way the referral would. Other customers may find trust in trendsetters such as a Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods and the celebrity associations with name-brand sportswear products. To complete the trust "cycle," the products must be good—they must at least meet the expectations of the purchaser in order to glean repeat sales. To complete the "cycle" the firm must do many individual operations independently well and as a whole repeatedly with the same level of excellence.

Beyond the initiation of the sale, trust comes from an entire company package. Analysis of customer retention and repeat sales speaks volumes for the level of trust. In other words, customer turnover and sales lost out the back door means that trust hasn't been solidly established. For example, a sales person representing air-conditioning products or computer software may easily be able to sell a product based on the product's quality. However, the installation crew can ruin a customer's trust if the unit or program is installed incorrectly. The era of the dot.com helped us to realize that placing orders and getting orders are two different issues. Front end classy computer software interfaces allowed us to view Pets.com, Toys R' Us and a plethora of purchasing options for holiday buying only to find that inventories were not tied to purchases or that shipping was completely behind the 8 ball.

Building trust begins with an analysis of customers'

expectations? What do they want and within what limits will they accept what is being offered? From that vantage point, every bit of trust should be measured.

Start with the products. For the price point what would people expect? From GM, Lexus, Toyota, Volvo, Ford and Mercedes' product lines, you would expect different levels of quality, endurance and performance. Would a customer be reasonable to expect a \$33,000 car to last longer and have more frills than a \$14,000 car? Whether purchasing dishwashing detergent, automobiles, bearings or fabrics, we place value and expectations on products based on their price points: the old adage, "you get what you pay for."

Look at the core operations that the customer comes in contact with during the sales cycle. Is your product sold at a large, mass-consumer department store or a specialty boutique, from a wholesale distributor or through direct retail sales, catalog (clicks) or showroom (bricks)? In each case, the customer is making a decision based on trust. If the sales representatives do a shoddy job putting together your paperwork, orders may be late and/or wrong. If the opposite is true, the buyer is on the path to developing well-earned trust. The same could be said whether the end-seller is a restaurant or a retailer. If the firm that sells your products is sloppy, dirty and perceived as unsavory, your name is tied to that image. (Think Firestone and Ford or Arthur Andersen and Enron.)

Dig deeper into the cycle and review how efficiently your phone system or call center services customers. Do they handle the calls properly and are they responsive? If you have ever been on hold for a software problem or to get your phone line installed, you know what we mean. Follow the whole trail of contact right through to the back door. Do orders ship on time? Are you telling customers the order has shipped when it's not yet finished or packaged? In today's information age, it is easy to go to UPS, FedEx, Airborne or most other carrier including freight forwarders and find the true ship date. A savvy customer can do wonders to track down your dishonesty...be careful. It doesn't take much to destroy that trust.

Lastly, look at the process systems in place. Advertising must meet needs that you can fulfill. No one expects a can of Old Spice to attract true love, but we do expect it to smell a certain way and be priced accordingly. We expect ABC to have news at 5 and Oprah on at 4. Customers expect certain things to happen on routine schedules, otherwise trust is thrown out the window. This involves more than just small

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talk. It involves the development of strategies that fulfill needs. This means making good decisions while building a firm's infrastructure, hiring personnel, designing products and services, and developing various management systems. The better you are at learning how to think through an entire process, the more likely you are to make decisions that build trusting relationships with customers. The objective is to insure predictable results for the customer or client and for the firms involved in the sale. Companies that have survived for decades have management consistently adding to their coffers.

## LOOK IN THE MIRROR: And Check Your Attitude

The New Years resolutions were made over a month ago already. Back in the swing of things, we're now faced with the reality of converting our good intentions to results. But on occasion, things don't go according to plan and it's easy to abandon that which could enrich our lives. When plans don't reap their expected rewards, it's easy to revert to self-defeating attitudes. Take a look at these to see if there is some negativity creeping into your psyche. Some attitudes that you'll want to avoid:

1. Take everything personally. When a customer, prospect, manager or co-employee gives you feedback, don't take everything to heart. Do you sit, ponder, and fret about how you are tied up in all the misgivings thrown on you by others?

2. Wallow in self-pity. It's a waste of time to beat yourself up. Why would you pound your head on your desk or steering wheel until the pain is no longer just a learning experience but a state of mind? eyes glazed over with despair can't see clear solutions.

3. Stop everything to concentrate on the negative in your life. The danger here is that you translate ONE negative EVENT into the ENTIRE STATE of your life. One bad thing does not determine the value of your life, career and direction.

4. Modify your beliefs based on others. We need others in our lives, but to live every action based on someone else's opinion is to suffer a slow, strangulating death. Realize that most people don't know more about you than you do. Parents, friends, co-workers should be able to support you

but can't always offer better direction than you are able to decide for yourself.

5. Do not learn from experiences. You can't rewind the tape and redo it, but you can acknowledge that if you had known better, you'd have done better. You learned a valuable lesson from something that didn't go your way. Now walk away with renewed wisdom and make something positive happen.

6. Take out your aggressions on others. (Okay, if they really deserve it...) Take responsibility for yourself and your actions and move on. Channelling anger toward someone else means energy diverted from improving yourself. It's just not worth it.

7. Put away your goals when things go bad. It's okay to indulge in television and mindless activities, but if you're using them to avoid building a better you and a better life, watch out. Feeling discouraged or intimidated is okay. When you avoid your goals/resolutions, you're only disappointing yourself. Never let yourself down like that.

Sure, things will go wrong once in a while, but those mis-steps do not define us, they teach us. If you don't like what you see in your "attitude mirror," the sure cure is to take ACTION: even baby steps are better than nothing. Life is too short to fall prey to attitude pitfalls.

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