

And You Call this Service?

What You Do After the Contract Is Signed Is Vital to the Sales Process

You wooed me nonstop for six months just to get my business. You collected referrals from me so you could sell your supplies and equipment to my friends and colleagues. You sent me a nice thank-you note after each deal you closed. You even took me to lunch.

But, now the tables have turned. I have a problem. I need service. You remember service, don't you? It's what you do after the sale. It's how you keep customers happy. It's what prevents customer defections. Remember service?

I called to tell you all about my problem. After I navigated that electronic maze someone calls a phone system, I finally got your voicemail. I left a detailed message. You didn't call me back for two days, so I called you again. It's funny how you always had time to return my calls when you were trying to get me to buy that contraption that's been broken more than it's been fixed. I left another detailed message early one morning. I was sure you'd get to me first thing. You didn't.

A day later some gum-chewing teen (I could hear her smacking that Doublemint over the telephone) returned my call only to tell me that my equipment was no longer under warranty and I should call the service department. Hey, you told me to call you directly if I ever had a problem ... I guess you were too busy milking my referrals to return my call.

I followed Chewy Girl's instructions and called the service department. What-dayaknow — another electronic maze. When I finally got what I thought was a real alive person, I realized I had been duped. It was just a very pleasant voice putting me on hold. I held. I held. I held

some more. I was on eternal hold. Finally a person, albeit a seemingly comatose one, picked up the line. Her lifeless voice foretold the agony I was to endure.

She asked me for the numbers in the upper right hand corner of my service contract. My contract bore no such numbers. She said that without those numbers the contract was invalid. And then, adding insult to injury, she told me to call you, my salesman.

Back to your electronic maze that's disguised as a phone system. I left you another voicemail message. No return call from you. The next day I left another message. Still no return call. Miss Chewy got back to me on the fourth day. I explained the problem of the missing numbers in the upper right hand corner of my service contract. She was clueless but promised to get back to me (famous last words...right up there with "I'll still respect you in the morning").

I waited a couple more days Still no call. On the third day I left a not-so-nice message threatening to call the sales manager in your territory. You see, my equipment was down and I was losing money. It's quite ironic that I can't seem to get a return call but I keep getting thrice-weekly e-mail blasts from you about the latest and greatest products that would really benefit my business

Will wonders never cease?! You called me back after that third message. You, yourself, personally, not the woman who keeps Wrigley's stock so strong even during a Dow Jones slump. I am still amazed that you found time to personally return a call from a customer...miracles do happen.

You were even big enough to admit

that you forgot to process my service contract, hence the missing digits. You probably forgot because you had moved on to the next conquest. And, kind you offered me an extra six months of service for free. I told you that with all of this aggravation, I'd better get an extra year for free. You conceded. And, you had the nerve to ask me for more referrals. I told you I'd get back to you with that. I need the time to gather the names of all of my slow-paying customers. I think you guys deserve each other.

You, dear salesman, have a lot to learn about sales and service. I don't have time to teach you everything that you need to know, but here are five pointers that will surely help.

1 Sales and Service Are a Winning Combination

It isn't sufficient to put your best foot forward to get the sale and then later show your true colors. You have to be consistent in your approach to sales and service. It's kind of like dating — whatever you do to get a person is what you have to continue doing to keep them. The promises that you make on your way to the sale have to be kept after the ink is dry. This is that novel concept called service. It's a commitment. It's a statement about your professionalism and your integrity.

2 Hire for Attitude — You Can Teach the Rest

Everyone in your organization is a reflection of you. Yeah, that gum-chewing person is a reflection of you, even though you buy expensive suits and take

prospects to great restaurants. Even though you have more charm than most can muster, customers will associate that comatose service representative with you.

Be very purposeful in your recruitment and retention efforts. Hire for attitude — a positive attitude, that is. You can teach aptitude later. Hire people who make the right statement about you, your company and its products. Those front-line folks are the ones that leave the most lasting impressions.

3 Use Technology Respectfully

Your voicemail should not be your shield from unpleasant customer situations. You should pick up ole' Alexander Graham Bell's invention and make personal contact with every customer that calls. And, here's the kicker, you should do it in a reasonable period of time. It should not take two or three messages to get a call back from you.

I really need to stress this: when there is a problem, YOU should be courteous enough to return the call. Not your assistant. Not your officemate. Not your spouse, your minister, your rabbi or your therapist — YOU!

Before I close this one, I have to tell you that I would appreciate a sales-oriented e-mail once a month. I could even stomach it every other week. But, a constant barrage gets on my nerves. I don't read them. You send too many. Enough already!

4 Earn the Right to Referrals

I understand that your business, much like mine, is built on referrals. Advertis-


ing only goes so far. The best marketing is a testimonial from a customer. But, I also understand the fact that you, dear salesman, have to earn the right to my referrals. You have to show me, through your consistent consideration and exemplary service, that you are the one to whom I want to attach my good name and reputation. You have to show me that you are worthy of my trust. So, wait a little while. Cultivate a real relationship. Show me what you're made of before you ask me for a referral.

5 When You Mess Up, Fess Up

I do appreciate the fact that you told me the truth about the missing numbers on my sales contract. I wish you had been more responsive throughout the process, but I do value honesty.

I also appreciate the fact that you offered me something for my trouble. You could have tried to slink out of it — I've seen that before. But, you showed that you have a little character by admitting your mistake and eventually trying to fix it. Just speed it up next time. Customers hate waiting for service.

Turning Sales into Gold

So, my friendly salesman, here you have five tips that are worth their weight in gold. Should you ever have another incident like the one I have documented, you will be better prepared to handle it. However, using these tips to prevent such a mishap will serve you better. 

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