

EASIEST CUSTOMERS TO GET – ONES YOU ALREADY HAVE

By Rick Boxx

Many business leaders love to go “on the hunt” for new customers. Perhaps there is the “thrill of the chase,” the excitement of identifying a new prospect. Then there is the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that comes from luring a customer from a competitor. For those having strong competitive impulses, this can be particularly exciting.

Obviously, adding new customers is important for growth. Sometimes we can increase the volume of business with existing customers, but to grow substantially it usually means expanding our customer base. At the same time we need to exercise caution. If we place our focus primarily on attracting new customers, existing customers may be overlooked in the process.

It is easy to take for granted those customers who have been faithful to the organization, assuming they are secure. After all, we might have been dealing with them for years. So why would they want to leave us? When we take this attitude, however, we not only run the risk of serving them poorly, but also can forget there are other “hunters” out there pursuing our customers while we are trying to attract theirs.

A time-tested principle of sales and marketing tells us it is easier to keep satisfied, existing customers than find new ones. Non-profits that depend on donors (customers) for financial support, for example, know it is much easier to retain a contributor that already believes in the mission than to attract new people to the cause.

This raises another question: Who is our customer? Some businesses do not restrict their “customer” label to those who purchase products or services. Customers, to them, also include employees and suppliers. In other words, everyone that participates in the company’s success.

This is a good business practice, but also is part of our stewardship before God. If He has blessed you with good customers, He expects you to value and care for them. Jesus told us to “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Luke 10:27). In other words, treating our neighbors – our customers – as we would want to be treated. How can we do this? Here are some biblical guidelines:

Be attentive to the needs of those in our care. If we concentrate too much on acquiring new business, we can fail to recognize critical needs of our existing customers. “*Be careful to know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations...*” (Proverbs 27:23-27).

Do not abuse those trusting in us. If customers are ignored or neglected, they may feel unappreciated and be lured away by competitors. *"You have scattered my flock and driven them away, and you have not attended them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds," declares the Lord*" (Jeremiah 23:2).

Put yourself in the customer's shoes. We, of course, are customers of other companies. How would we like to be ignored or pushed aside in favor of some new client? That is why Jesus instructed His followers, *"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you"* (Matthew 7:12).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. From your experience, where is most of the emphasis placed – retaining existing customers, or seeking to attract and acquire new ones? Why do you think this is so?
2. Obviously a business grows by adding new customers. So how do you think company leaders can strike a balance between pursuing new business while at the same time ensuring current customers feel adequately appreciated and served?
3. Have you ever thought of your customer as your "neighbor," as Jesus defined it? How does that affect how we approach customer relations?
4. A Bible passage cited tells us to "be careful to know the condition of your flocks"? How do you think a business can apply this guideline with customers – even our suppliers and employees – in practical ways?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 15:1-6; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; 1 Peter 5:1-3