

CUSTOMER SERVICE: THE ONE NON-NEGOTIABLE**Robert J. Tamasy**

Years ago I learned a universal business truth we all would be wise to never forget: It is easier to retain customers and clients you already have than to attract new ones. This principle holds true for both for-profit companies and non-profit organizations. And the best way of retaining customers is through consistently excellent customer service.

I was reminded of this recently when my wife and I had a very disheartening experience at a restaurant we have often patronized. As we arrived, two of the staff members were discussing a problem with a coworker. When she realized their conversation was loud enough to be overheard, the hostess hastily apologized.

The young man guiding us to our seat was pleasant, but our server was perhaps the worst we have ever had anywhere. He was abrupt, did not smile, seemed inattentive and frankly, made us feel as if we were intruding on his time. I will not bore you with the details of our poor service, except to say this was the first time I can remember being anxious to finish our meal and leave the restaurant.

Unlike as is so common today, I did not turn to social media to register my displeasure. Instead, I went to the restaurant's online customer comment page and described our dismal experience. Within an hour a manager from the establishment called to apologize, ask for more specifics, and then insist he would "make it right" by sending us a certificate for a complimentary meal. That seemed reasonable enough, but weeks later we have yet to receive anything or hear any more from the manager or anyone else from the restaurant.

So we not only received poor service during a dinner outing we had been anticipating, but also had cause to doubt the integrity of the restaurant's management. If you want an example of bad customer service, there it is. Now we do not plan to ever return, despite good experiences in the past.

I would contrast that with companies I have consulted with where excellence in customer service is their top priority. They strive to exceed customer expectations if possible, and when there is a problem, they give the matter immediate, full attention, determined to do the right thing every time. How do we succeed in doing that? The Bible offers some timeless recommendations that work, regardless of one's spiritual convictions:

Caring for others as you would expect to be cared for. In creating a customer-centered culture, a good question to ask is, "How would I want to be treated?" As Jesus told His followers, "*Do to others what you would have them do to you*" (Luke 6:31).

Giving is the surest way to receive what you want and also to achieve your objective. Giving, whether materially or in terms of service, provides its own reward – customer satisfaction, loyalty, and one's own sense of having performed a job well. "*...remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*" (Acts 20:35).

Put other people first. When customers realize they are recipients of the best service and attention possible, perhaps even more than they had expected, repeat business is virtually guaranteed. "*...in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" (Philippians 2:3-4).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had a particularly memorable bad experience as a customer or client? If so, how did you respond – and did you continue to patronize the business that made you feel mistreated?
2. What is your company's general attitude toward customer service? Does it have a formal statement of its customer service commitment or philosophy?
3. Do you agree with the view that it is easier to retain existing customers than to find and develop new ones? Why do you think that is the case?
4. Which of the biblical passages and principles cited in this Monday Manna seems most meaningful to you?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions from the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 18:12; Matthew 20:27-28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27; 2 Corinthians 8:9;
Philippians 2:7