

Chris's Corner: I always think win/win

Many people love to say that business is so competitive and, to a degree, that obviously is true. If I do what I do in business and a guy across town has a company that does exactly what I do, we obviously are competing for the same customers and the same business.

However, too often, people in business take this highly generalized concept of competition and try to apply it to every situation. As in, everything is a big negotiation and someone wins and someone loses every time. I think, especially in a supplier/vendor relationship, nothing could be further from the truth.

Heck, I have thrown a lot of games on purpose to let people know, I don't have to win anything to be of genuine service.

When I do business with someone, be it providing service or selling a piece of equipment, I go to extremes to put myself in my customer's shoes. Whatever business we conduct, I want the end result to be the best possible outcome for both of us. I want to provide a product or service to that customer with real value attached to the transaction and I want fair compensation for my efforts.

I don't want to take advantage or pull the wool over someone's eyes, ever. People eventually learn the business; they learn the market and understand what value is over time. How could anyone expect to stay in business, long term, and still take advantage of someone because they simply have more knowledge or experience than the customer?

Regardless of a customer's experience or knowledge, I always put them on equal ground with me by sharing my knowledge and experience that I have obtained over 26 years in business. When I do business with someone, it is like I am doing business with myself. I tell them what I know. I tell them what I think. I tell them precisely what I would do or buy given the situation, if I were the customer. I have turned down a lot of business over the years, by telling people the truth or sent them somewhere else with their money.

The beauty of being totally open and honest with your customer is when they figure out that you are for real and are looking out for their best interest, they will open up to you. They might be more forthcoming with their needs, wants and other circumstances so that you can take that information and tailor make a solution for them that is perfect for them and you too.

If you are playing a game of cat and mouse, you are wasting your time and your customer's time.

I can't tell you how many times I have been in a situation with a customer and they want to buy what I have to sell, but we can't come to terms. I don't try to beat them down and make them accept my price. I remind them, that even though they may think that they really, really want or need what I am selling, that they have all the power. All they have to do is say no to the deal, which is basically the same thing I am doing, saying no. If it's not a win/win deal in both of our eyes, it's no deal at all and no hard feelings.

Additionally, I find that when I am total forthcoming in making recommendations to my customers, based upon my knowledge and experience, and they disagree, most often they will tell you something you did not know about their particular business or industry that will educate you. They will say, "I understand what you are saying and I understand why you are recommending this to me, but in my circumstance or in this industry it wouldn't work that way. Let me tell you why....."

No one knows a business or industry better than the person who is running it or is in the industry. You take that exchange and that knowledge they dropped on you, for free, and apply it to the next similar situation you encounter and you are serving the next customer even better.

I tell my customers about the challenges I face. The reality of my situation and they tell me about theirs. We work together to create a transaction and ultimately a relationship that is win/win. Win/win is built to last.

Even in the case of guys who are basically in the same business as me, I don't treat them with disrespect or loathing. More often times than not, we are

friendly. I lose customers to them, they lose them to me. I always believe there is more than enough pie in the world for everyone. For every customer, there is a perfect supplier. Sometimes it's me, sometimes it's not and so it goes.