

Chris's Corner: Here is a Cliché that is always true

We've all heard the saying "the customer is always right."

My advice to you is to not analyze the saying, word for word, and compare it to a situation you may find yourself in. Instead try to grasp and adhere to the underlying meaning and, if you do, you won't go wrong.

Regardless of your business, if you don't attract and retain customers who spend their money with you, you will go out of business.

If you find yourself with an unhappy customer, tackle the issue head on. Hear them out completely. Let them talk, let them vent. Actually listen to what they have to say. For every vocal customer you have how many do you have that don't speak up, but silently walk out the door, never to return?

Potentially their issue may, in fact, be valid and taking the steps to address their concerns may improve customer satisfaction or, better yet, improve your operational efficiency or profitability.

Even if the perceived problem is not a major issue in your eyes, from the customer's shoes it is completely legitimate.

Apologize sincerely and profusely. Repeat the customer's concerns back to them so they know you were actively listening and ask what you can do to make things right with them because they are a valuable customer.

Every customer is a valuable customer. Many businesses make the mistake of thinking only those who spend the top 10% of purchases are valuable. This is a grave mistake. It is the pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters that pay your overhead and are a bulk of your transactions. The big spenders are rare and often come with a transaction cost all their own. Every customer is valuable; period.

When you ask the customer how you can make things right you are going to be surprised. In my experience, 98% of your customers will ask for something in return that will be less than you are prepared to offer. If, per chance, you think the customer's request is unreasonable make a counter offer or perhaps compensate in a like dollar amount with a lower cost (to you) item.

Many businesses spend a large part of their budget advertising. The whole point of advertising to attract new customers and obviously it works. However, think about what a pittance it costs to keep and retain current customers. Your advertising is to grow your business, customer

relations is to keep their business. Why spend money to get customers if you cannot keep them?

I do very little advertising, but I am big on customer service and customer retention. All my customers are terrific. Your customers are too.

Therefore, my friends, the customer is always right.

*I think I wrote an article once about firing customers. I have fired customers who were unreasonable, or for whatever reason were not worth keeping.

However when I politely ask them to go elsewhere, I have always ended on friendly terms. If they were disputing an invoice, once again, I would tell them, "I understand we let you down. You don't have to pay. It is obvious we can't take care of your needs. We will no longer be accepting service requests from you as we cannot meet your expectations."

You'd be surprised how many of those very same customers came back at some point in the future and asked to do business with us again, no hard feelings. Many of these customers turn out to be some of the best customers after testing the competitive waters and because I didn't play hard ball, they wanted to come back.