

Customer Care - Inside and Out

By JoAnna Brandi

We are all beginning to realize the value of developing long term, loyal relationships with our customers. They buy more and refer more, help us develop the next generation of products and services, and they even help us keep our advertising costs in reason. But are our customers (people external to our company that buy things from us) the only people we should be building long term relationships with? No. The relationship strategy applies externally and internally as well.

What if we were to take the concept of Customer Care and extend it outward to our suppliers and inward to our employees as well?

Our suppliers provide us with goods and services that we usually add value to and pass along to an internal or external customer. If we began thinking of our supplier as our business partner, one with whom we shared our dreams and visions of the future, one with whom we could achieve an ongoing, profitable, win/win relationship, we would be doing our customers a valuable service.

Many years ago I was responsible for all of the direct marketing services at a large trade publisher, I had as my supplier a very reputable, quality driven data processing bureau. I went to this supplier, with whom I had a good relationship, with the dream of one day being able to provide instantaneous, on line, subscriber list counts for my customers, on a PC. (This was not possible 13 years ago) I was told it couldn't be done and at first I accepted that. As I watched technology improve, a year later I went back and discussed this vision again. I somehow knew it could be done. I was told I didn't need it, my customers didn't need it, and besides it would be too expensive to develop. The supplier had his own needs in mind, not mine. When it became apparent that I wouldn't be able to budge him, I budged myself and moved all of my business. I found someone who listened and would work with me to achieve my dream. Today, everyone has that technology, and that supplier lost my lifetime value to him. If he had viewed us as a "partner" he might have worked harder or differently with me. Could you be working differently with any of your suppliers?

The other group of people that can help us achieve our goals and reach our highest potential are the people that work for us. Some companies call them employees, some call them associates some, workers. In reality, they too are customers, internal customers. They are customers and suppliers to each other and add value to each other's work which eventually ends up in the hands of our end user customer.

In the old, industrial model of businesses, employees served bosses, not customers. In today's customer driven marketplace that has to change. The customer demands prompt and on the spot decisions, especially when they have a problem. The worker serves the customer, not the boss. This changes everything.

When we want the people that work for us to provide a level of care to customers that foster long term relationships, we have to provide a level of care to them that inspires, by example, trust, respect, open and honest communication and appreciation. Customers can tell when someone has a genuine interest in them and their well being. Care comes from caring. If you want to create value in the marketplace, first create value in the workplace.

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She is the author of two books on customer loyalty, one on positive thinking. She is an Authentic Happiness Coach and has written hundreds of tips and articles since starting her business in 1990. She shares her insights in her twice monthly Customer Care TIP and asks you, "Is your customer care EXQUISITE?" Not sure? Take the Quiz: www.customercarecoach.com/public/quiz.asp

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