



Trust and Customer Retention

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

It takes only a few seconds for customers to assess the level of trust between people in any business. If your business has low trust, you are probably losing valuable customers every day.

Since trust is something you cannot fake, it does little good to tell the service people to “just smile and act nicely.” Customers see through a phony show of esprit de corps and put-on friendliness.

Instead of teaching employees to be fawning and sweet with customers, focus on creating a culture of high trust throughout your organization. Customers notice and appreciate a real culture where people are not playing games with each other. Here are a couple examples you will recognize because you have undoubtedly experienced them in some form.

There is a McDonalds Restaurant on the Thruway that I avoid, if at all possible. The reason is that every time I go in there, I am semi ignored as the employees bicker between themselves or with their managers.

I find myself waiting for service and listening as the employees have their backs to me and focus their attention on their own petty problems. There is no trust in that group, and I certainly do not appreciate the aggravation.

On the other extreme, there is a Greek Restaurant that I often patronize because I get a warm feeling of friendly service based on how the employees treat me and each other. The interpersonal trust is evident within a few seconds of walking in the door.

Customers are very sensitive to the environment of an establishment, and if the culture is one of low trust, the customers will learn to avoid that business, just as I avoid that McDonalds.

Sometimes people in organizations forget that they are also customers of other businesses. It is like they do not see the difference between serving others at one point

and being served an hour later. It is helpful to picture yourself on both sides of the counter. You can gain significant insights by paying attention to how you react when you are the customer. If change is needed in your area, why not start making change today?

Exercise for you: Take notice today of the groups you see at work. Do they display a culture of high trust, or are they just trying to act nice? Perhaps they are being hostile to each other in front of valuable customers. If there is a deficit of trust in your environment, chances are it is impacting revenue. Work to change the culture with urgency.

Going back to the McDonalds example, the cure is to get the leaders to understand the value of real trust between people. Perhaps some leaders need to be replaced or retrained about how customers expect to be treated: not just with a phony smile and “Welcome to McDonalds” but with a culture that truly values the employees and puts customer service ahead of slogans.

The preceding was derived from an episode in “Building Trust,” a 30 part video series by Bob Whipple “The Trust Ambassador.” To view three short (3 minutes each) examples at no cost go to <http://www.avanoo.com/first3/517>

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