

Sales Ethics: Oxymoron or Opportunity

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A study in Business Horizons magazine from Indiana University, found that customers increasingly base their buying decisions on whether they believe a company is ethical. Cynicism promotes fickle buying habits. "Corporations wishing to improve their relationship with the public, must let stakeholders know when they participate in undertakings that benefit the commonwealth," advises the magazine.

Companies that take the "high road," will make lifelong customers out of even the most distrusting consumers. Who is the main connection between the company and the customer? The Salesperson! A company's ethics and integrity are based on the relationship between the salesperson and the customer. How does one build or maintain an ethical foundation that will make a lifelong customer?

Here are four "ethics questions" that may help in establishing this kind of relationship.

1. Does my decision affect anyone else besides myself and the bottom line?

If a salesperson reports selling more items than he/she actually sold, or induces customers to "load up" on products during a promotion period, it is a type of cheating that affects many people in adverse ways.

One must consider the effect of one's decision on the company, the customer and on one's own integrity. The best decisions are made when one becomes "other-focused", or customer focused, if you will. Will the greater good be for you or your customer?

The overall goal needs to be—What can I do for you, to get you to cooperate with me?

For life isn't in the getting, but in the giving! The degree that you give is the degree you get!

2. How do you become successful? Making sales or making loyal customers?

When you "make" a customer, you have begun the process of establishing a trust dimension. This trust becomes the basis for not only your business, but for friendships as well.

Trust is the basic building block of any relationship. We don't buy from people/companies we don't trust! Why should your customers buy from you if they don't trust you? Experience has proven that the more time you spend in building solid trust-based relationships with your customers, the more loyal they become and consequently the better your bottom line.

The emphasis in sales must go into relationship building, not just into the sale of products or service.

What is the basis of developing a trust dimension? Honesty!

3. Are ethics and service intertwined?

What is good for the customer must always supersede what's good for me. Going the "extra mile" for one's customers establishes a valued based added dimension that will build trust, alleviate worry, and become the basis for all future business.

Criticizing the competition always cheapens us in the eyes of the customer. Prove how valuable each customer is by being honest, customer focused and truly committed to exceeding your customer's needs. Time should be spent, not in "brow beating" the competition, but rather in informing the customer of the benefits of doing business with you. This should be the goal for developing business.

Remember, today's customer requests are tomorrow's customer demands!

Continued on page 2

If you help your customers with what they need, they will come back to you for what they want! How are needs fulfilled? By doing what we can to meet the customer's time line, requirements, and expectations in an enthusiastic, and ethical manner. This builds trust and when trust exists, relationships flourish!

4. What is the "PTP" factor?

In whatever you do and in whatever you decide, you must always keep in mind the "PTP". What is the PTP? What is your Price To Pay for what you want to do? And if you can't pay, then you better walk away! For what goes around always comes around!

Decision making is like throwing a rock into a pond. No matter how big or small the rock is, when it hits the water, water is displaced! Likewise, no matter how big or small your decision is, other people are affected and that reality must be a consideration before you make the decision! Decisions that we hope no one finds out about are usually wrong.

Do you really want the sale at any cost? At the cost of your company's integrity? Your own integrity? Your company's reputation? Your reputation? For what goes around always comes around!

Always do what's best for the customer. It will always come back to you. Remember, people like to do business with people that can be trusted, make them feel good, and will give them the very best advice, service and product!

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