

# Wisdom for Wednesday

*Positive messages for daily living. Pass on the good feeling – forward this to your clients so they can reap the benefits as well.*

## Difficult Customers ...

It is currently fashionable for service industries to train their staff to ask: “Is there anything else I can assist you with today?” or “Is there anything else I can help you with?” at the conclusion of business. The psychology of this is to subtly remind you that you have been provided with a service i.e. helped. The key word here is ‘else’ - inferring that there has already been a transaction. Stronger terminology would be: “Thank you for doing business with us” or “We value your business so please let me know if you have any further problems/queries/concerns.”

All this has come about as a result of research which conclusively proves that it is more cost effective to deal with a problem before it gets out of hand than to attempt to fix it after the event. Additionally, remember the old adage: invest in the customer you have because it costs five times more to gain a new one; and that 80% of your business comes from 20% of your customers. By now experience will surely have shown you that once won over, an antagonist can become your strongest ally. Convert a disgruntled customer and you gain a small tribe. Because conversely, that same customer left to simmer will do you untold harm. Frustrated people vent – they vent copiously. First they will tell all their immediate friends and anyone they come into contact with twenty-four hours after the incident, and unless the matter has been resolved to their satisfaction, they will continue to tell the story and it will be embellished over time.

Their friends and acquaintances will casually mention the story to their friends and before you know it, one small incident has sparked a rumour that becomes (real or not – exaggerated or condensed) conveyed something like: “Well I haven’t dealt with them myself but I’d be a bit wary because I heard they have a lot of unhappy customers.”

The moral of this story is that every customer is worth putting in that extra effort. Agreed there is no excuse for someone being rude or aggressive with you but telling them to calm down or giving them a lesson in manners will only aggravate the situation. And no matter what, don’t argue with them because you can’t win even if you are right. It is important to remember that no matter what is said or how it is phrased, this is not personal – stay objective and don’t interrupt them. It is more likely that your customer has had a bad day or something else is going on in their life and this is perceived as the last straw. Often they have reacted without having the complete picture or before they have considered other options.

Often, when they have time to reconsider, they will be mortified at their behaviour and embarrassment will prevent them from coming back - so allow them to retract their dignity without losing face. Giving them time to cool down or providing them with an easy way out works best: “Given the circumstance, I would be upset as well.” Don’t antagonise them by patronising them or denying their righteousness – address their feelings first: “I can see that you are very upset by this. Let’s see what we can do to sort it out.”

And finally, the most important thing to keep in mind: ***Your customer pays your wages.*** They have other options and will quickly exercise them if you don’t look after them. Don’t ever take them for granted and always keep the dialogue open and ongoing. As long as your customer is talking to you they have no reason to talk about you – unless of course it’s to spread good news.

*Lynette Davies*