

Are Customers Worth It?

By Anne M. Obarski

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I remember years ago there was a hair color commercial on TV that had a memorable line, "I'm worth it!" The company used different actresses over the years, but each one had to say the line, "I'm worth it". I think that line was used many times by many people in different situations merely to state the fact that, we ARE worth it! Worth what?

Worth being treated by the golden rule. Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you, period. I know there are other "rules" that are spin-offs of this one but I like the old one best. For business owners, this rule represents sort of an insurance policy. Insurance bills are one of those things I hate to pay. I don't seem to have anything tangible after I pay it. I may never have to use it, and it would be just my luck if I let the bill slide for even a day, something terrible would happen and I would need that insurance in a hurry.

I have insurance because I am worth it. I am worth protecting. I am a wife and a mother and a business owner. I have worked hard and I think I deserve the "comfort zone" that insurance brings me. One of the insurance plans I have is the American Automobile Association, better known as AAA for my cars. I haven't had to use it very often but it is nice to know if anything should happen, help is a phone call away. Living in Pennsylvania, winters can be treacherous and who knows when you could get stuck in an awful snowstorm.

I do remember needing to be towed once. But it wasn't in the winter; it was in late spring. I was at my sons' baseball practice. I had driven my car up to the field and parked in a line with all of the other parents. To make room so that others could pass us, we all had the passenger side tires off the road in the dirt. Well it was a very wet spring and the area my car was in had just been seeded. I never noticed that when I got out of the car. Two hours later I returned to find my passenger side tires submerged in the mud and my car tilted at what looked to be a 45 degree angle. Worse yet, mine was the only car that looked like that!

I can't tell you how many "comments" I got from other parents walking past my car! Luckily, when I called the number on my AAA card, they didn't laugh and they sent someone out very quickly. How busy could AAA be on a sunny May afternoon? The tow truck driver was polite, snickered when I couldn't see him, and pulled my muddy car safely out of the oozing mud.

My insurance was worth it that day. Insurance is always worth it. It is worth it because we are worth it. It is a comfort zone!

Our businesses should offer the same comfort zone. That comfort zone can't be purchased but it can be developed. Every day our employees show customers that they are worth our time and our

attention. The following are three areas to focus on to maintain a AAA rating for your company.

A= Attitude Sometimes customers receive the "I have had a bad day" attitude from employees. Three out of four customers leave a store because of impolite, inattentive salespeople. The customer doesn't deserve that treatment. Your store is like a stage and the employees are the actors. Everyday is "opening night". Leave your problems outside the door and polish your performance. It's time to WOW the audience.

A=Aware Always be aware of what is going on around you. Sometimes sales associates feel that they are in a bubble behind the service desk, never to move or approach a customer. That may have been true years ago, but not now. Employees have to perform many tasks and take care of the customers. The old saying, "You need eyes in the back of your head" has never been truer. Be on alert, you customer is watching!

A=Audience Actors can tell whether they have the audiences attention. All eyes are on them. The audience is riveted to their every word. There is nothing else happening that is more important than that relationship between the audience and the actor. That is no different than the relationship between the customer and the sales associate. Greeting the customer, making eye contact, listening to their needs and finding a way to satisfy their wants is part of being a good audience.

These three words are the basis for good employee training. Have a positive attitude, always be aware of your customer whether in your store or on the phone and most importantly, be the audience that is sensitive to your customers needs. This is your retail insurance. And you can bank on the fact that your customers are worth it!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne works with companies who are performance, profit and people focused and helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at www.merchandiseconcepts.com or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>

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