

In Business, Image Isn't Everything; It's The Only Thing!

By Chuck And Sue DeFiore

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We have all heard this lament, but how much do we practice it. With all the relaxed rules today, do we really present ourselves in the best light. It seems all the articles I see today are about how old fashioned today's workers find their supervisors or bosses to be in the way they dress, the policies they implement and the old fashioned ways in which they conduct their business.

I am of the belief, and will continue to believe, that the first impression I make is the lasting one. Whether it is by phone or in person, I want to present myself in the best possible light. But then again, I am from the old school, the one today's workers are complaining about.

Let's look at the companies that are still standing. After all the hoopla has passed, the companies that have used the fundamental principles of Business 101 are the ones still among us. The Intels, IBMs, Burger Kings, AT&Ts, Sears, Microsofts, Dells, Gateways, etc.

I am not advocating living in the dark ages. I believe for a company to survive it has to move with the times, but the basic structure and foundation on which we have built our business - image, courtesy, ethics, the customer being right, are the cornerstones to running a successful business, whether it is home-based or not.

Too many home-based business have taken the pajama mentality into all of their business practices. I have called on businesses that have cute messages on their machines, music that is obnoxious, children answering the telephone, screaming televisions, radios in the background. This does not inspire confidence in me to do business with this person.

That is not to say I have not had reservations about companies that have offices outside the home. In fact, it was a call placed to one that inspired this article. When I called and spoke to the owner of this business, she had no idea on how a particular process worked or what it's cost would be. Wow, it's her business and she doesn't know how it works or what it costs. Guess who I didn't do business with. I am not saying you have to be an expert, but at least know the basics and tell me you employ an expert in that area that will be better able to help me, don't hem and haw and tell me you don't have a clue. This does not give me a good impression of you or your company.

There are businesses in corporate offices that are more fun houses than companies...and they don't inspire any confidence in me either, so I am not picking on home-based businesses.

The purpose of this article is to remind all of us (home-based and non-home-based) that how we present ourselves is of paramount importance.

When you answer your telephone, answer it in a professional manner. When you go to an outside meeting, if you are home-based, dress for the meeting, not for home. If you have clients come to your home, be sure it is presentable, and that you are too. Just because you work out of your home, does not mean, shorts and a T-shirt are appropriate for meeting a client. Have your identity package (business cards, letterhead, brochure) done professionally, proofread and spell check any correspondence that leaves your office.

Your first impression, whether in person, by phone or correspondence is a lasting one. Make it a good one and you'll have clients for life if you treat them right - the old fashioned way.

The only place I've ever found I was wrong is with restaurants. Some of those little holes in the wall have turned out to have the best service and the best food, so I guess when it comes to businesses, you can't judge all books by their covers, just most of them.

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