

Who Do You Trust?

By Anne M. Obarski

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Who can you trust? That is a very powerful statement. Our country and yes, even our world, has been asking itself that question recently. Who do I want to do business with? Who are my friends? Who can I count on? Who can I leave my children with? Again, whom do I trust?

As many have said, business will no longer be "business as usual", since the events of September 11, 2001. But in many ways it has been a wake up call that we must all hear. Simply, evaluate how you treat your fellow man.

People around the country have said there is a difference in how people greet each other. Crime has dropped over the past week. People are smiling and making eye contact with one another. There is pride in wearing something that is red, white and blue. The American flag has become a "best seller" on retailers' sales charts! And it is OK to hug your kids a little tighter, pat the dog one more time and be thankful you have a home to dust or lawns to mow.

Some businesses are going to experience large losses. Many companies may even think of closing their doors. The question will remain, "Who do your customers trust"?

Do your employees trust management? Do those who have authority use it as a punitive tool or do they use it to develop people and the organization? Does your company have a goal that everyone can rally around, or is it business that pushes for sales at all cost? If you interviewed your employees would they say, "This is the best company I have ever worked for"?

Where does trust start?

It starts by building a business without "self" at the top.

Customers can tell fairly quickly if the business is customer driven or sales driven. That will become much more apparent in the future. People will be looking for the signs that products are safe, that advertising doesn't lie, that companies will stand behind their products, and that you have earned their business based on, yes, trust.

Give your customers multiple reasons to trust you. Communicate those ways now and in the future. The following ways are just a few things you can do to cement that trust.

1. Call your best clients or customers to say hello. Everyone just wants to talk right now. This is not the time to push a product but just to be a friend.

2. Send a card or handwritten note to customers let them know you are thinking of them.
3. Run an institutional ad to show your support of our nation.
4. Show your patriotism within your company and outside your company. Let the American flag fly proudly. And by the way, make sure the flag is in good condition and not tattered and torn or bleached out. Also make sure that it is lit at night.
5. Remind employees to answer the phone and talk to customers in a positive and sensitive way. Discourage negative talk in front of customers such as complaining of hours, breaks or lack of days off.
6. If you have a logo or company tag line, start using it where ever you can.
7. Use nametags. We have gotten away from this little habit. Partially out of fear. Fear that someone will accuse us of a wrongdoing. Or contact us outside of work. I would advise to just use the first name. Let your customers put a name to a face to help develop that relationship, and that trust.

The above seven items are only the beginning of many other ways you can think of to solidify the trust you have between your business and your customers. I used to tell my audiences that the word "business" has the letters "u" and "i" in it and with out those two letters you have nothing. The dollar bill we work so hard to receive, has those precious words, " In God We Trust". It is time to look inward and outward at who we trust, and why.

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 she 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 <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com> or anne@merchandiseconcepts.com

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