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## **Service with a Smile is Good Business**

by

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There is a lot of talk in this country now about the "service economy." What that means in practice is more of us are working (part time) at McDonald's and as supermarket checkers. Such changes say a lot about the national economy, but here I want to emphasize what they say about service. Service positions -- working directly with the public, often at low-skill and low-salary positions -- are not necessarily service. We have much to learn about real service from the Europeans and others.

In France, for example, service is a skilled, respected career. In fact, what is so renowned about expensive French restaurants, besides the food, is the service. There is none of the proverbial French snootiness. The entire staff greets you by name at the door. You feel like a welcome guest, not a customer. This attention works as well in New York as in Paris. Following a \$10 lunch near Roscoe, the French proprietress thanked my wife and me personally and shook our hands. Did I remember that effort and will I go back?

What does this have to do with marketing agricultural products? The universal point is that we all like to be fussed over, to be made to feel important. This is true whether we are buying a fancy dinner, a truckload of tomatoes, or a single cucumber. Here I am not referring to the proverbial joking of the salesman, but to working at being considerate of your customers. Try to remember something personal about them: preferences, family events, sports teams followed. If this does not come readily, then write something down when a transaction is

completed and study your notes in idle minutes. Instilling a real service mentality in employees is difficult, but remember that example is the best teacher.

Perhaps what really characterizes service is sincerity. If I serve you because service and your satisfaction are important to me, that is sincere. If I put up a purchased sign saying, "Our Customers Are Number One," and everyone around me has the same sign, that isn't sincere. And, all in all, sincerity is tough to fake.

Service, real service, is good business. It just needs to be done and to be felt, not only talked about.