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Your Most Important Asset

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What is your most important business asset? While many business people think of assets as buildings, inventory, land or equipment, I'd like you to think about another type of asset--your customers. After all, without your customers, there is little need for a building or equipment. Although we hear a lot now-a-days about the importance of customer service, unfortunately, it still remains a somewhat illusive concept to many business people. So how can you turn these popular buzz words into a reality for your business?

The best way to begin is to jump right in through a total commitment to customer service at every level of your business. This not only means that you should understand the value of customer service but every one of your employees should, too. Here's the bottom line: to make customers your most important asset, every employee and person associated with your business must be as committed as you.

Here are a few basic rules of customer service to share with your employees in creating a truly customer-driven business.

- Make the customer feel heard. Listen to them, both in good times and bad!
- Make the customer feel understood. Paraphrasing their comments back to them will not only clarify the customer's comments but also make them feel heard.
- Make the customer feel liked. Getting to know your customers is a big plus. If possible, learn their names and learn a little something about them.

- Make the customer feel respected. Again, listening and putting your customers in the drivers seat is a great way to show respect.
- Make the customer feel helped. Do whatever you can to help customers. If you can't personally help them, make every effort to find someone who can.
- Make the customer feel appreciated and remembered. A thank-you after the sale is a must. In fact, a thank-you even if there isn't a sale is a must!
- Remember your customers by using their names the next time they come in and with cards and letters at appropriate times of the year.

Once you've taken the time to discuss these basic customer service rules with your employee and management teams, develop a customer service checklist. For each of the following questions answer either YES or NO. If you have answered NO then determine how you can improve immediately. Set up a plan to insure that the new customer service efforts are implemented.

1. Do you have an overall concept that customers are very important—that their actions will make or break the business?
2. Do you avoid preconceived ideas of who will buy and who won't?
3. Do you have patience with an irate customer? (Do you react quickly with anger or do you respond quietly and calmly until the problem is settled?)
4. Do you avoid talking to your friends while the customer waits impatiently?
5. Do you extend other courtesies such as explicit directions for reaching other departments or facilities?
6. Do you avoid being impatient on returns?
7. Do you avoid acting hurriedly and impolitely when closing time is near, which may result in losing the last big sale of the day?
8. Do you listen carefully to what the customer really wants?
9. It's a good idea to review this checklist with your entire staff regularly, perhaps once a month. By following a few basic rules of customer service and then checking on your progress monthly, you'll have a great start on making customers your most important asset!