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Following through with the Golden Rule

Treating customers well is an approach that, rather than being progressive, is a sure-fire way of building business

By Bill "Hippy" Hippenmeier -- Industrial Distribution, February 3, 2006

Applying the Golden Rule as the foundation for true customer service? A revolutionary concept!

In a day and age where we spare no expense to send people off for customer service training workshops to make them better employees, I have to stop and wonder if that is a real solution—or if it's helping to perpetuate the problem.

Don't get me wrong, I'm all for customer service. I would not have been employed in such a successful company for as long as I have been without always putting the customer's needs first. It just seems to me that if we go back to our earliest memories of life lessons about manners, the tried and true "treat others as you want to be treated" adage may work better than hours of classroom training.

At Amazon Hose and Rubber, we make it a point to teach our employees to treat our customers much like a doctor would treat his or her patients. Each person who walks through our door brings with them a problem that is unique to that individual, and it is our responsibility to approach each opportunity to provide a solution on a case-by-case basis.

That's the fun part of being an industrial distributor. Every day is different from the one before because each situation we are faced with is unique.

I love to watch the eyes of our warehouse technicians light up when they discover a solution to a problem that a customer previously thought unsolvable. Even more, I love to watch the eyes and smile of that customer who leaves our building with their problem resolved.

Those are the customers who keep coming back to us, and those are the customers who send others our way. There is no greater compliment than being referred business, as it indicates that our efforts to achieve customer service excellence are paid off.

It is so rewarding to me when we receive referrals from companies in related industries because they know we will take the time to serve each customer's needs and truly solve that person's problem. I am proud that we have that reputation in our industry and in the markets that we serve.

There have been many lessons taught outside the classroom that stress the importance of good customer service skills. I've learned that, in order to be a leader in the industrial distribution industry, you have to be prepared for people to ask just about anything.

Nothing surprises me anymore. As an example, early in my career, I was asked to help provide a solution for a dog that had broken his leg and kept trying to chew through his cast. A couple of hours later, that dog left Amazon Hose and Rubber with a large hose, fit exactly over the cast on his leg. His owner said he never tried to chew the cast or the hose off after that point, and the dog's leg healed beautifully.

It would be a blatant omission to not mention that this way of treating customers is not always the easiest, or most profitable, way to attract and maintain a steady customer base. There exists a great deal of price competition from mass production companies along the Pacific Rim, but I know that people value our commitment to individual attention.

How can you mass produce personalized service? How can a mass production line really listen to the problems of customers? Despite this competition, Amazon Hose and Rubber's sales have continued to increase, and I have to believe that this is due in large part to our customer service philosophy.

I recently laughed at the irony in hearing that how our company treats customers is rather progressive. I wanted to argue that using the Golden Rule to dictate how Amazon Hose and Rubber treats our customers is actually almost as old as time itself. But it was a customer who said this to me, and I wouldn't argue with a customer.

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