

Six Secrets for Making Your Customers Feel Like Stars

By Donna Cutting

If Johnny Depp walked into your workplace today, how would you behave? If you're like most people, you'd drop whatever you were doing and approach him, smiling, ready and eager to serve him. If Halle Berry walked into your restaurant, you'd immediately escort her to the best seat in the house. If Tom Hanks was on the phone asking questions, you'd do whatever you could to get him his answers...cheerfully....right?

What about the rest of your customers?

Perhaps you're thinking, "Of course, we'd treat them exactly the same way!" Maybe. In general, though, customer service has become a "buzz phrase" that is rarely lived up to. A study done by Connell and Associates (2004) found that 45% of all respondents felt that most companies simply do not provide good customer service. In a Harris Interactive Study 80% of respondents stated they had made the decision to never do business with a company again because of bad customer service.

How can you - the business owner or service professional - turn this trend around?

By treating your customers like stars!

As Garrett Richter, president and CEO of the First National Bank of Florida, tells his employees, "If we roll out the red carpet for billionaires, they won't even notice it. If we roll out the red carpet for millionaires, they expect it. If we roll out the red carpet for thousandaires, they appreciate it. And if we roll out the red carpet for hundredaires, they tell everybody they know."

To his point, the same Harris Interactive Study found that 60% of respondents said the main reason they would recommend a company is outstanding customer service.

Here are six secrets from the world of celebrity that will get your customers buzzing about you.

Give Them a Red Carpet Arrival. When a celebrity arrives for a movie

premiere or a charity function, it's a big deal! There's a red carpet. There are photographers. There are hundreds of fans lined up, shouting their name and begging for a chance to spend even two seconds with the star. When the rest of us arrive at a place of business, we're lucky if we can even get someone to acknowledge us. Treat your customers like stars by showing them you're glad they came. Look up, smile, walk out from behind the counter and greet them. Most people don't need a fancy carpet or paparazzi - just eye contact is enough!

Call Them By Name. Motivational guru and author Dale Carnegie said that when remember someone's name you "make them feel important." Remember your customer's name and use it each time you see them. Make it a top priority, and you'll find remembering names easier than you think. You can also find unique ways of using someone's name. For instance, High Point University welcomes all expected guests with their own parking space designated by a sign bearing....you guessed it...their name. Some restaurants name dishes after famous people. What if you named some of your products after your best customers? Now that's the star treatment!

Remember and Refer. Aside from their name, remember other details about your customer as well and refer to them. When one grocery store manager recalled that the "grumpy lady who comes in on Wednesdays" had been to Chicago to visit her daughter, he asked her about the trip....and made her day! Now, that once grumpy customer seeks the man out with a smile on her face whenever she comes into the store. It doesn't take much to make ordinary people feel special. Just pay attention.

Cater to their Personal Preferences. While your customer may not be as picky as the celebrity who wants all the brown M&M's taken out of his candy dish, everyone has their likes and dislikes. Surprise your customer in little ways and let them know you are paying attention. In his former career as a banker, Author and Speaker Dave Timmons earned the business of a prospect after he tossed him two baseballs signed by the members of his grandsons' favorite sports team. One hotel dining room supervisor heard a guest say that she enjoyed blood oranges, so he secretly had a few brought up to her room. Delight people in this way and you and your business become unforgettable.

Give Them SWAG! At every awards show celebrities walk away with gift bags filled with products and paraphernalia worth thousands. There is a reason why

people line up - and even pay good money - to give their goods away to celebrities via the swag bag. When the superstar wears or uses their product, it creates buzz. When Katrina Campins, star of the first season of *The Apprentice* wore a watch on the show that was given to her by Jacob the Jeweler, she was swamped with calls from men wanting to buy one for their wives. While your customers may not have the platform that Katrina had to show off your product, when you give them something for free they will talk about it. Just watch how much press Ben & Jerry's gets next time they hold a "Free Cone Day." What kind of swag can you give your customers to get them talking about you?

Be Extraordinary...And Then Some. Make a commitment to be remarkable in every way that you serve your customer. Be the first one to respond. Have the widest smile in the room. Call everyone by name. Constantly be on the lookout for little ways that you can make your customer feel like the most important person in the world. When you do, you will find yourself not only with a customer for life, but with a raving fan that will go out and spread the word about their incredible celebrity experience.

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