

Making a Positive First Impression

Not only is a positive first impression important, but if you make a negative (or even neutral) initial impression, it will take numerous positive encounters to make up for it. And it's possible that NOTHING you do will ever fully make up for a negative initial impression.

There is one simple concept you can share with your employees that has the potential to make a tremendous impact for better customer service and ultimately better business. It isn't necessarily easy, and it won't transform your organization into a customer-driver company overnight, but it is quite straight-forward and can positively impact your business's service level.

QUICK TIPS

Smile. A lot. Nothing Nothing says "I'm happy to see you!" like a warm smile.

Be enthusiastic without going overboard. A good rule of thumb is to gauge the customer's energy level, then dial your own up just a notch higher.

Dress for success. Make sure that what you wear and your grooming are appropriate for your situation.

Ask good questions and show genuine interest in the customer.

Don't chit-chat with other employees in the presence of customers.

Take the initiative; Be proactive, not reactive.

Be positive, upbeat, interested, respectful and considerate.

The simple concept this - Making a positive first impression. As simple and obvious as this may seem, many organizations and individuals get "tunnel vision" over time and no longer see their business from the customers perspective. It's easy to forget that every day, through every interaction with customers (both new and long-term) and co-workers, you're making first impressions that set the stage and tone for the rest of the encounter, and the rest of your relationship.

When arrive at work in the morning, how do you acknowledge your coworkers? Do you make a proactive effort to give them a positive, enthusiastic greeting. Or are you one of those people who claim to not be an "early morning" person until you have had your three cups of coffee? Or do you give them a positive greeting on your "up days" and pretty much ignore them on your "down days?" If your objective is to encourage the people you work with to interact productively and enthusiastically for the rest of the day, your early-morning greeting is simply setting the tone for any interaction that follows.

How about interactions with long-term customer? When you meet a customer you've been working with for many years, are you upbeat energetic and genuinely enthusiastic to see them again? Even if you just saw them last week? Or are you more likely to be polite and friendly, in a professional way, without going overboard? While there's nothing wrong with that, how do you think the customer compares your greeting (consciously or subconsciously) with the enthusiastic, energetic welcome they get down the street from someone who's trying to earn their business? Over time, the customer is likely to gravitate toward where they feel most appreciated, and that feeling is generated in the first few moments of every encounter.

Clearly it makes sense to work at consistently making a positive first impression. But just how exactly do you go about doing that? That's actually the easy part, once you've gained an awareness that it's something you should focus on.

Make certain that when a prospective customer first encounters your company, whether this is at your place of business, on the telephone, or through a representative calling on them, the first impression is exceptionally positive. And then with every additional encounter continue to focus on first impressions, reinforcing the initial positive experience.

When you are interacting with customers, what's the most likely first impression they have of you? Answer the following questions to get an objective gauge as to whether or not you're creating the best possible first impression:

- Do you dress for success? Ibis does not necessarily mean wearing a business suit, tie, etc. It means dressing appropriately for the situation. Is what you're wearing going to make a distinctly positive first impression?
- Are you clean and well-groomed? It probably seems a shame that if s necessary to even ask this, but if you've been in many retail establishments lately you know it's not something you can take for granted any longer.
- Do you smile warmly and greet people with natural (not forced) enthusiasm?
- Do you make eye contact, use the other person's name (pronounced correctly) and ask questions that show your sincere interest?
- Bottom line: Are you RFALLY happy to see them?
- How do you answer the phone? Do the people calling you feel that you welcome their call, or do they feel as if they are an interruption?
- If you ever have calls go into voice mail, what's the tone and energy level you're projecting on your message? Is it upbeat and enthusiastic?
- Do you truly "engage" with customers showing them that you're interested in 5 proactively meeting their needs?
- Do customers walk away from you with a little more bounce in their step because you "made their day" with your genuine warmth and enthusiasm?

This may seem a lot to ask, especially if up to this point you haven't really been focusing on these issues. But isn't this what YOU want when YOU'RE the customer? Whether it is or not, it IS what they want, and if you're going to exceed their expectations, this is what it takes. And remember, not only is a positive first impression important, but of you make a negative (or even neutral) initial impression, it will take numerous positive encounters to make up for it.