

# Concentrating

With the downturn in the economy, service counts even more in the game of gaining and keeping customers.

by Kindra Gordon

**H**igh gas prices and the climbing cost of groceries are on everyone's minds these days. And, as a result, cost-conscious consumers are looking for value more than ever before. This means they want their dollar to go further toward getting them more.

Those same customer demands are likely to trickle down to your seedstock operation if you sell registered bulls and females. With today's economy, customers are seeking value there as well. But, value does not have to mean they want to buy their seedstock at lower prices. Instead, value can be added by offering exemplary customer service, industry information and a genuine guarantee on the product they are purchasing.

So, as the fall and winter cattle sale season ramps up, it may be a good time to consider what services you are offering to attract and retain customers. To help with that process, two professionals in the customer-service industry share their insight.

California-based David Aaker is a national speaker and trainer on customer

service who has worked with banks, hotels and state departments of tourism. He says, "Customer service is not a 'big' thing; it is a million little things."

Likewise, Shep Hyken is a Saint Louis-based author and professional speaker who works with companies and individuals on building loyal

**Shep Hyken advises producers to treat their customers with the Platinum Rule: "Treat people like they want to be treated."**

relationships with their customers. His clients have included General Motors, Disney, Ford, Kraft Foods and Merrill Lynch.

Hyken says businesses need to understand that there is a huge difference

between satisfied customers and loyal customers. "Loyalty is about creating an experience that makes people want to tell the world about you and the great experience they had," — and there is no question that they plan to come back and do business with you.

## Build your reputation

Aaker and Hyken agree that building a successful business hinges on building a stellar reputation. How is that done? It's based on the customer's past experiences.

Aaker gives this example: Say the name of a business and most people will have a service expectation based on their past experience. Think about Wal-Mart, the Department of Motor Vehicles or the Internal Revenue Service. Chances are most of these have a poor connotation, he says. Now, consider Bloomingdale's or the Ritz-Carlton — each has a recognizable high-end reputation.

Based on that, Aaker challenges businesses to think about the reputation they've established for their own business.

Hyken explains that the "moment of truth in business" is when a customer forms that impression. He says you certainly want that impression to be better than "OK."

How can you elevate an impression? Hyken says it is all up to the people operating the business and the service they provide.

To illustrate this point, Hyken gives the example of McDonald's. He acknowledges that wherever you eat at McDonald's, be it Idaho or Illinois, the food always tastes the same. Yet, we know some McDonald's restaurants are "better" than others. Why is that?

## Customer service stats

In their careers of training others on customer service, David Aaker and Shep Hyken have amassed some interesting statistics about customers. They include:

- ▶ Calling customers by their first name amplifies their listening by 35%.
- ▶ 65% of customers leave because they don't like how they were treated.
- ▶ An unhappy customer tells an average of 13 people.

- ▶ It costs five times more to gain a new customer than to keep an existing one.
- ▶ If you resolve a problem in the customer's favor, 70% will remain your customer.

Hyken says that when dealing with a complaining customer, the best way to restore the customer's confidence is to work quickly to fix the problem. "By trying to help solve the issue, you diffuse the confrontation and you may be able to retain the customer," he says.

# On Customers



**“Information is giving out; communication is getting through.”**

— *David Aaker*

“It’s the people and the service,” Hyken says. “When you get a few extras — like a smile, friendly service and a clean restaurant — it makes it a better experience.”

Hyken recommends business owners recognize the value of being friendly, providing information and staying abreast of customers’ needs. Rather than the Golden Rule, he calls this the Platinum Rule: “Treat people like they want to be treated.”

Aaker adds, “When you go out of your way to provide service, you’ll build loyalty. And, people will pay more for a product if service is implied.”

## **Additional services**

Both Aaker and Hyken include enthusiasm on their list of essentials for successful businesses. “Enthusiasm is a huge ingredient. People want to be associated with that,” Aaker says. He jokingly uses the quote, “If you catch on fire with enthusiasm, people will travel for miles around to watch you burn.”

Hyken adds that enthusiasm is contagious, but he says, “Not being enthusiastic is also contagious — and that’s bad for business.”

“Under-promise; over-perform” is another mantra these two professionals promote. They say everyone likes to be surprised with someone going the extra mile for them. “Don’t just give customers what they expect. Give them more than they expect,” Aaker says.

Maybe you provide them with a gift certificate or slight discount for their many years as a valued customer. Or perhaps you do something special for first-time

customers. Think of some way to add some extras for your clients.

Strive to communicate with customers, Hyken and Aaker say. Aaker emphasizes that there is a difference between providing information and communicating.

“Information is giving out; communication is getting through. These two words are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different meanings,” he says.

Hyken adds that lack of communication is often what causes customer service glitches in business. He encourages asking extra questions of customers to ensure that you understand what they want.

Showing appreciation is also an important attribute, Hyken says. He advises saying thank you to customers daily and promotes writing at least one thank-you note a week.

“Be thankful for each and every customer, every time,” Aaker says. Doing so will reflect the quality of your business and the dedication to customers.

