

module one: customer service

Greetings and First Impressions

article:

Authentic Connecting One Step at a Time

by Laurie Guest

Connecting with others to build a relationship in business can oftentimes be difficult. Case in point, take my high school job of making donuts at a grocery store. Every Saturday morning, I rose before the sun, arrived at the store, dropped dough balls into grease, then frosted them. Being genuinely happy doing this was a bit of a stretch for me. When the store opened for business, I would have to authentically connect with customers even when I didn't feel like it.

At the end of the evening, we had to tightly wrap the pasta salads in preparation for our 9:00 p.m. close. And without fail, every single Thursday night, the same lady would arrive at 8:45 p.m. needing a quarter pound of this and a quarter pound of that right after I had sealed the salads. It was always the same size serving and always the same salads and I would robotically go through the motions with a fake smile.

Then one day, I realized that I could prepackage those salads, seal up the bowls, and not have to redo my work. You should have seen the smile on her face when my customer showed up, and her quarter pound of ham salad and her quarter pound of coleslaw ready to go. Authentic connecting. It all begins with the first step, even if it is a small step.

Put on your business mindset at work.

I learned this mindset at an early age from my father. As a farmer, he was required to rise early for work. He never complained about being tired or about dealing with uncooperative weather conditions. He put on the work mindset at the same time he put on his cap. As a professional motivational speaker, there are days when I struggle to get in the motivation mindset. However, I find it helpful to focus on the audience in the room and share in their enthusiasm for the event they are attending. In other words I take the focus off myself and shift it to the end user.



Watch out for self-absorbed behaviors.

It is easy to fall into a trap of a guest encounter being all about you instead of the guest. Once, I was at a resort that offered very expensive massages. I decided to treat myself and looked forward to the pampering. I went down to the spa and met my masseuse. The moment the massage began, she told me about all the negative things in her life. She went on and on about a boyfriend, a demanding mother, a bad childhood even. By the time the massage was over, all the negative energy had moved from her into me. Even though I was tenser than when the massage began, I was expected to pay a lot of money for this experience. See, she didn't authentically connect with me. She made it all about her and nothing about me, which made it the worst massage I've ever had. I would never go back. I would never recommend. That's not going to help the resort have repeat customers.

When our guests interrupt our plans, it's hard to keep superior service in place. For example, two bank patrons arrive at different banks around lunch to have two different experiences with a bank employee. One bank customer walked in, and the bank employee was leaving for lunch. She stopped and said, "Uh, I was just leaving for lunch." She might just as well have said, "I don't want to take care of you. I already had a plan, and you've interrupted it." The other bank customer entered a different bank, but the banker stopped and put her purse down. The customer said "Oh, I don't want to stop you from wherever you were going. I could come back and see you later." The banker replied, "Absolutely not. You're here now. We're going to take care of you now. Lunch can wait till later." Though both stories are absolutely true, look at the difference. Which banker would you rather do business with? Be very aware of how often you use the word "I" when talking to a guest. If the conversation is all about you, the connection will be difficult.

Use active listening and responding.

When you ask questions, be sure to turn the active listening button on in your ears and your brain. At the grocery store where I shop, they've been trained to say the same thing every time you check out. "Did you find everything okay?" At that point in the transaction, all of my groceries are up on the belt. Now is not the time for me to say that I couldn't find something. It's when I was out in the aisle that I needed help.

One day I decided I would test them. I would actually answer the question, "No, I didn't find everything," just to see what they would do. The person taking care of me was delightful. She smiled. She greeted me. She was doing everything right.

Halfway through the transaction, she turned and said, "Did you find everything okay?" I said, "Actually I need eight ounces of Velveeta cheese, and I couldn't find it anywhere." I saw her shoulders slump a little bit. She replied in a slightly agitated voice "Okay..." and turned on the light to have another staff person find the cheese. Though she had the scripted line, she didn't have the authentic connection to match her reaction to my request.

Engage in finding a solution.

Every guest who calls or visits your company is looking for a solution to something. It can be as trivial as looking in a craft store for rubber stamps to make greeting cards. It can be as serious as a visit to a dentist to find a solution to excruciating mouth pain. If a solution in a craft store or a dentist office is found, a connection is made. Help the guests find the product or the service that delivers the answer to their needs, and they will be back. The authentic connection builds rapport and must be a priority for your team.