

Your Clients Aren't Loyal

Try nurturing loyalty.



by Lenann McGookey Gardner

CUSTOMER LOYALTY IS A great idea. Imagine having clients who appreciate you for what you do, and who wouldn't think of retaining someone else to do that work for them.

As a consumer, how loyal are you? Do you patronize the people who provide services to you, without thinking about it, or do you shop around?

We all shop around. People are always looking for a better deal, a lower price, or good services for less. They may not seek other bidders, but they'll look at every great offer!

Since loyalty is rare, and even your best clients often seek competitive bids to keep you "honest," what can you do to grow your revenue base? Here are five ways to boost customer loyalty:

1. Have a plan for sustaining relationships. If your clients aren't hearing from you, they're likely not thinking about you—they are thinking about the people who've called them today, proffering a better deal for the services you provide. Have a system for communicating with your clients regularly. Contact them at least once a quarter. Send an article likely to be of interest to them, and put a personal note on it, saying that you're thinking of them, and would be happy to discuss the subject of the article, their situation, or progress with them. Set up a time for that chat, if appropriate.

2. Stay aware of your value, and ensure your clients are too. Calculate return-on-investment: the increase in profits, not sales, net of the expense of paying for your service or product over a reasonable time. If your services or products are likely to help your clients grow their sales, it's simple to compare their sales before working with you to their sales after doing so. Other services and products cut expenses; be sure you collect information about their expenses after working with you, and compare those figures to expenses prior to your arrival. Your value may be difficult to calculate, but you should work to quantify something. What's their savings—if not in money, then in time, even just reduced hassle, as a result of

their decision to work with you?

3. Share the story. When you've made a difference for a client, create a case study—the story of a client's experience with you. Explain to your client that you do this as a matter of course; you keep the case studies, like client testimonials, for the benefit of others who are considering working with you, so they can understand the results you've helped people achieve. When your clients read a case study of their success, it builds their loyalty.

4. Bring them clients. Your prospects are in business, too, and there's nothing you can do for them that will be more appreciated than buying from them yourself, or sending others to do so!

5. Earn the business. Devote time each week to communicate with your clients. Schedule these contacts regularly, and always act on any requests.

Might you refer them to someone you know who can be of help? Could you locate some information for them? Can you help in any way? If so, then do it! Going out of your way to help a customer might cost you a little, but your extra effort will be noticed by the client.

Don't expect clients, no matter how satisfied, to be loyal long-term. Clients are attracted to anything that's fresh and new or lower cost—especially when the relationship has deteriorated.

It's much easier to generate the second dollar from a client than it is to get a new client to spend the first dollar. Still, nurturing relationships is necessary, and nurturing only occurs if you schedule it and make it happen! **SSE**

Lenann Gardner is the author of Got Sales? She is a winner of the AMA's "Marketer of the Year" award. Call 505.828.1788, or write Lenann@YouCanSell.com.

ACTION: Cultivate customer loyalty.