

## Customer Care = Cash!

By George Hedley

Every holiday season companies send out hundreds of greetings cards and small gifts of appreciation to their customers. Last year, a management company received one bottle of champagne, two baseball caps, three large fruit and cheese baskets, four wall calendars, five logo shirts, six boxes of chocolates, seven tins of popcorn, eight cans of nuts, nine plates of cookies, ten bottles of wine, and 187 greeting cards from their suppliers and contractors. These were warm, delightful gestures, but was it worth the effort?

Customers want to know you care!

Chances are, your company received a similar number of gifts this past holiday season, but did any of them really matter to you? Were they unique, special, or personalized? Three weeks later, can you honestly remember who gave you what? The number one reason customers stop doing business with a company is an attitude of indifference. They don't think you care about them as a valued customer or as a person. They feel like you treat them the same as every other customer. You market and sell, get customers to buy your product or service, do quality work, send an invoice, and then never call again. In a challenging economy like the current one, this 'business as usual' kind of practice can mean the death of an organization.

What do you do for your customers to show you care and appreciate their business on an ongoing personalized basis? How do you stay in touch? What do you do to help their business be successful on a regular basis? In this competitive marketplace, you've got to set yourself apart and do more than your competition. Impersonal holiday cards or standardized annual customer gifts are a waste of time and money if that is all you do to build loyal customer relationships.

Customers want to know you care about them, their business, their challenges, and them as individuals. Building trusted relationships, like with friends, takes time and constant contact. With spouses, friends, or clients, once a year is not enough to keep things alive. The best way to develop loyal customer relationships is "face-to-face" time with them. These are relationship-building sessions. To stay best friends or keep customers loyal, you must spend quality time together on an ongoing, consistent basis. Most small service businesses have between 12 to 24 loyal customers who make up the majority of their profitable sales. As your important customer list is relatively small, it doesn't take a lot of time to keep in touch and build lasting relationships with top customers on a regular basis.

### Take care of your "Top 24"

Make a chart of your top 24 customers. Keep track of the meetings, contacts and relationship-building sessions you have with them. In order to maintain and keep these relationships, make a commitment to have two customer care meetings every week. This plan will insure you see each of your "Top 24" at least every three months. These settings must be face-to-face. They should include breakfast or lunch, ballgames, dinner meetings at your local industry association, golfing, fishing, hunting, or just after work refreshments. Get together in a fun setting where you can really get to know each other, let your hair down, and have some fun mixing business and pleasure. And remember, business meetings, negotiating contracts, arguing over price increases, taking orders, or transactional



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phone calls don't qualify as relationship-building settings.

One-on-one time will allow you to discuss what really matters to your customers: their likes, dislikes, family, friends, and future. Find out how you can do more, provide better service, or improve quality for them. Build trust and confidence. Laugh, learn and grow closer. Give them advice on how to grow their business, improve productivity, do a better job, or make more money. The key is to show them you care about their future success in every way you can.

### One-a-Day Vitamins

Make it a habit to thank clients on a regular *and* unexpected basis. Send out one hand-written thank-you note or card every day to a valued or potential customer. Tell them you appreciate the opportunity to do business with them or thank them for letting your company be on their team. Occasionally send out small gifts of appreciation as well. The key is to do it. It only takes a minute. These notes, cards and gifts work like "one-a-day" vitamins. They keep your bottom line healthy. Your notes need only be one or two lines long as short notes make big statements. Always handwrite them - including the envelope. Look for top quality, different, interesting, fun, or motivational cards to send. The more unique, the better.

### Make it Personal

When you see a good business article or book on an area your customers are working on, send them a copy to show you care about their future. If you know they like golf, get them a picture book on the world's best golf courses. If they like to fish, get them the latest lure that will catch the most fish. If their spouse likes fine wine, get them a bottle of the best wine you have ever tasted. If their son plays little league baseball, get him a ball cap from his favorite team. Get the point? Make it personal.

Time is money. Meaningful time and constant contact with customers is BIG money. Remember, doing a good job, quality workmanship, proposals, faxes, emails, job meetings, correspondence, and phone calls don't count compared to having consistent meaningful relationship-building sessions and constant contact. Make it a priority to invest in your future by investing time in your customers. Customer care in a consistent special way will return big cash and create loyal customers who only want to do business with you.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Best-selling author and professional speaker George Hedley helps entrepreneurs and business owners build profitable companies. His book "Get Your Business To Work!" and his proven business success blueprint system has helped thousands of companies earn more, work less, build wealth, lead people, and generate loyal customers. To receive a free copy of his "Profit 101" book, sign-up for his e-newsletter, or hire George to speak, visit [www.hardhatpresentations.com](http://www.hardhatpresentations.com), email: [gh@hardhatpresentations.com](mailto:gh@hardhatpresentations.com), or call 800-851-8553.

