

11. Client Assistance

When a client comes for assistance they are coming to us with more than their apparent need of food and clothes; they are coming with a need for a sympathetic ear, a need to be loved, a need to be respected, a need for God. When we greet them with a warm, cheerful, heartfelt greeting, with an attitude of acceptance, they will be put at ease, we let them know from the very start we care about them, their family and their situation.

“God calls *not only* for your benevolence *but for your cheerful countenance, your hopeful words, the grasp of your hand.*” Testimonies for the Church Volume 6, p. 277

Our body language speaks louder than our words. As we allow God to fill us with His attributes our countenance will reflect the joy in our hearts. With the mind of Christ, we are able to regard a client the way Jesus would. It can be easy to interact with a client and think ‘I am so glad I am not like that.’ This way of thinking is how the Pharisee looked at life. God desires us to have the attitude of the publican, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’

It is not wrong to judge others, the key is how I judge them. When we see others through the eyes of God as His prince or princess, the apple of His eye, we become willing to judge them **better** than ourselves.

“...in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [*thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves*]. Philippians 2:3 (The Amplified Bible)

“In trying to help the poor, the despised, the forsaken, *do not work for them mounted on the stilts of your dignity and superiority*, for in this way you will accomplish nothing. Become truly converted, and learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart. We must set the Lord always before us. As servants of Christ, keep saying, lest you forget it: “I am bought with a price.”” Testimonies Volume 6, p. 277

When we judge others and regard them as higher than ourselves, God is able to use us to our full potential as one of His agents.

Portraying the Gifts of the Spirit

After greeting a client and making them feel welcome, give them your full attention as you would a long lost friend. Keep in mind they may feel self-conscious or embarrassed, kind words and acceptance on your part can go a long way in putting them at ease.

“In time of trouble, when people are emotionally disturbed, they tend to be more sensitive to the reactions of others, and consequently they may assign great meaning to what we say and do in helping them.

“We have found that just ordinary kindness and seemingly casual relationships with a client to whom we have given only a bit of service at a time of need is commented upon long afterward in glowing terms. At such times we have been surprised to learn what we

did meant so much to the person. Likewise, a brusque manner, a hurried and inattentive response, abrupt questions timed to our pressure rather than to the applicant's readiness to answer them, may take on values irrelevant or out of proportion to their intent. In such an instance the individual may personalize our response and charge us with having been reflecting, indifferent, or suspicious when we were only busy and fatigued. When this occurs, his feeling of mistrust and resentment may well be strengthened." Common Human Needs, National Association of Social Workers, p. 22 as quoted in the Community Services Manual, Third Edition – 1978, Review and Herald Publishing Association, p. 52

When we are rushed and distracted we are placing the 'things to do' above the child of God that is before us. There will always be 'things to do,' it is a never-ending cycle of responsibilities, but we will not always have the opportunity to minister to this one for whom Christ died. God is teaching us to lay aside our cares and be genuinely interested in the difficulties of another. This change does not take place over night, it is a process God takes us through as we allow Him to change our characters (see "A New Heart"), it is the process of sanctification.

"The fruits we bear will reveal the condition of our hearts, and give evidence of our sanctification through the truth. **This sanctification** takes in not only our greatest, but our smallest actions. **The little things done for Christ's sake, humble acts of kindness, a cheerful disposition to do others good,**--this is confession of Christ....**Jesus must be formed within,** the hope of glory, **before you can rightly represent him to the world in words and works.** In every little matter of life, **in your deportment, in your forbearance, patience, long-suffering,** you make known to others whether or not you are abiding in the living Vine." The Signs of the Times, April 13, 1891

As we minister, the question to ourselves should be, 'am I yielding my mind to Christ's renewing power, which allows Him to shine through me'? Remember, my purpose for serving is to give God more opportunity to create His character in me, and allow Him to shine His light through me as He uses me as one of His agents. What a privilege to be used of God to show His love to His children.

Giving Assistance

The Initial Contact

When a client comes and asks for assistance at the register, they should be informed that someone will assist them momentarily. The register person then calls for the designated person on duty to come and serve the client.

The Interview

Greet the client warmly and discuss their situation in a private or semi-private location nearby. Ascertain the client's needs and give them an idea of how you may be able to help them i.e. 'we don't have any dressers, but I am sure we can help you with a sofa today'.

Pick Up

Before selecting furniture, find out when they will be able to pick the items up. If it is going to be more than two days, ask them to come back when they have a way to transport. You do not want to have a store filled with items you are donating, but have yet to be picked up.

The Selection Process

Our goal is to assist with items that are considered necessities. A bed is a necessity, a mink coat is not. There will be exceptions; we do not consider a TV a necessity, but in some instances it may be – a TV gets struck by lightning; an invalid's only source of contact with the outside world.

This goal should also be balanced with an attitude of always being open to give that extra item that will brighten someone's life and home – a picture to grace a wall, a toy for the kids, etc.

For furniture and larger items, take the client to each section of the store that contains the items they are in need of. If there is more than one item available, point out the ones they may choose from, 'This sofa is available, this sofa is available,' etc. This gives a sense of dignity and allows them to choose what they feel might look best in their home.

The client may ask about an item you did not point out, 'what about this one'? You may simply say 'that one is not available' and leave it at that, or you can explain why, 'it is already sold/on hold' or 'there are items that are not available because we have to reserve some things to sell to be able to continue our ministry'.

Documentation

The bottom part of the Client Assistance form may be filled out before or after 'shopping.' When their items have been selected, fill out the top part; place a 'tick' next to the price for each item in a category. List each piece of furniture and the dollar value.

Tagging

Place a hold tag on the larger items if the client needs to return to pick them up. Mark a D (for Donation) to the right of "Hold Until" on the hold tag. Notate the date and time it must be picked up by, we usually allow 1 to 2 days. Tell the client "I will hold this for you until Thursday at five (date – time)."

The use of the hold tag makes it clear to all involved what the client was told and when the item will be available for sale again if it is not picked up by the client. It also allows you to take additional holds on the item. When the hold tag expires, it is removed and the item is for sale.

How Much to Give?

As we become willing to give 'disinterestedly' God is able to more clearly direct us in how much we should give in each circumstance. There may be times when someone asks for many items and God directs to give only a few, on the other hand there may be times when God directs to give more than has been requested.

Just because someone may come with a long list of needs does not mean we have to fill it. They may want a sofa, chair, kitchen table, dresser and beds and God may lead us to provide them with all of those things, or He may direct to assist them with a sofa and chair and that is all, or just a bed. The key is to be willing and open to how God would have us respond.

If you feel God is directing that you have given all that should be given at this time, you can answer the question of 'can I have this?' with 'what I have given you so far, is all we will be able to help you with today'.

Small Items – We allow the client to shop on their own in the Kitchen and linen area with guidelines. They may shop for 1-2 sets of sheets and blankets per bed (depending on how many beds they have and your supply of linens) and kitchen supplies appropriate for their family size.

Clothes – When a client comes with a need for clothes, we let them choose up to five outfits per family member. This number may vary depending on the circumstances. If they are the victim of a house fire they may have a greater need.

We allow them to shop off the rack; they know better than us the size and taste of each person. When they are finished 'shopping', they return to the designated counter, where we record the items they have chosen on the donation form.

A way to deal with clients who want to come on a regular basis is to reduce the number of outfits you allow them to take each time. Another option is to let them know they can only come back after a certain period of time, two months, six months, how ever God directs at the time.

Advantage

As one of God's agents we are learning that no one can take advantage of us. Everything we have has come from and belongs to God. As God directs us to give we can be assured He knows how He is using the blessings we give to continue His work of drawing a person to Himself.

As we give, it is not our responsibility to know or control what a person might do with the blessings they receive through us. God has asked us to give, as we allow Him to direct us, we know He is bringing good out of our willingness to give. If someone takes from us under false pretenses, we are not the ones they will have to answer to.

Counsel

Unless you are a licensed counselor, you cannot give clients advise or recommend a course of action. You may share your own experience in similar situations, and point them to Christ. We may encourage people but that should not translate into counseling as we are not licensed counselors in this world of litigation.

Referrals

It is not possible for one agency to meet every need of every family. If we have a knowledge of the local agencies and what they offer, part of our assistance to those who come to us for help, can be to point them in the right direction, to refer them to the agency that may specialize in the area of their need.

Before you make a referral it is important to know which agencies supply what services and to whom. Compile a list of local agencies and what services they offer. Have this list available to give to a client, and to refer to as you seek to be of service. Include on your list information about each agency; name, address, phone number, services offered and eligibility requirements.

Here are some ideas of agencies to add to your list:

Government;

Social Security Office

Food Stamp Office

Local Government Financial Assistance

Charitable Organizations;

United Way

Salvation Army

Meals on Wheels

Senior Citizen Center

Medical Clinic

Churches;

Food Pantries

Financial Assistance

Other;

Location of AA Meetings

Take care when making a referral that the client does not leave with the idea that because you have referred them to another agency, the client will automatically receive assistance (unless you have spoken with the agency and that is the case).

Lending Money

The assistance we give is primarily tangible items; clothes, beds, sofas, etc. At times we are approached with a request to borrow money for a specific financial need. With a willingness to give, we take the request to God and allow Him to direct. Loaning money can be an avenue God uses in training individuals to handle greater responsibilities.

Giving a loan is slightly different than giving “disinterestedly.” With a loan there is an agreement between the parties for repayment. When someone requests to borrow money, they should understand you expect them to pay it back. A simple form with an agreement between the parties should be filled out. When possible write the check directly to the financial need (e.g., electric company, land lord).

God will lead if you are to loan more, when an individual asks to borrow additional money before they have paid back a previous loan. He may lead you to gently let them know that the funds available are needed to help others and that God is giving you direction that you are not to help them financially at this time.

We should not give a loan because of the ‘story’ we are told; we are granting a loan because God said to give. There will always be a story, and very seldom are we able to verify that the entire story is accurate. Our willingness to give a loan should be based on whether or not God is prompting us to lend, not on the ‘story.’

When someone comes to make a payment, thank them for being responsible with their money and encourage them.

As God Blesses Us, We are to Lend

God has instructed us to lend.

“The LORD your God will bless you as he has promised. **You will lend money to many nations** but will never need to borrow!” Deuteronomy 15:6 (NLT)

Should We Charge Interest?

There are several texts that discuss not charging interest to a brother.

“Do not charge interest on the loans you make to a **fellow Israelite**, whether it is money, food, or anything else that may be loaned with interest.” Deuteronomy 23:19 (NLT)

“If you lend money to a **fellow Hebrew in need**, do not be like a money lender, charging interest.” Exodus 22:25 (NLT)

Then there are some texts that discuss not charging interest at all.

“A person who makes money by charging interest will lose it. It will end up in the hands of someone who is kind to the poor.” Proverbs 28:8 (NLT)

“Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD?

Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?

...Those who do not charge interest on the money they lend,

and who refuse to accept bribes to testify against the innocent.

Such people will stand firm forever.” Psalm 15:1-5 (NLT)

If our purpose is to shine light in darkness there is no need to charge interest.

Lend Freely, Understanding You May Never be Paid Back

“And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even sinners will lend to their own kind for a full return. ³⁵Love your enemies! Do good to them! **Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay.** Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, **for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked.**” Luke 6:34, 35 (NLT)

When someone asks for a loan, what is your first reaction? Check their credit, ask for collateral, verify ability to repay? According to Jesus words in Luke 6, we are not to do any of the above. Our first response should be to lend, ‘hoping for nothing again,’ to lend, realizing they may not pay us back.

There are two sides to a loan, ours and theirs. On their side, it should be clear that we expect them to repay the loan. On our side, we lend – as God directs – regardless of their ability to repay. We are to lend, *accepting* payment, but not *expecting* payment.

When an individual makes contact to let us know they have not forgotten they owe, (“I am going to pay you back”) a response might be “thank you so much for being in contact with me. I appreciate you letting me know what is taking place and I know you plan to make it good.” God will direct when dealing with each individual in how ‘aggressive’ to be in collecting.

The world lends expecting to be paid back, God is asking us to be different, to operate in His economy, to learn to trust Him for our every need. With our willingness to lend, God is able to direct when it is appropriate. Lending is another avenue God will use to shine His light in darkness.

Giving Money

We usually refer request for money to one of the local agencies that give financial assistance. However, we do help with funds on occasion.

When helping with large sums of money, make a check out to the entity that is owed, e.g., power company, landlord.

We have set aside cash for smaller amounts. We fill out a receipt with the clients name and have them sign. Keep track of these disbursements as you would petty cash (make an entry each time funds are dispersed to a client). Smaller amounts include request for assistance with gas, prescriptions, etc.

One way to handle the many requests for money, is to set aside an amount that can be used each month for financial assistance. This can be a set amount or a percentage of the previous months sales. Draw up guidelines regarding how often you will give financial assistance to the same family and what criteria will be used to determine need.

Conclusion

As we continue to allow God to transform our hearts, we will be a people who are known by the following characteristics:

“When darkness overtakes the godly, light will come bursting in. They are **generous, compassionate, and righteous.** ⁵ All goes well for those who are generous, **who lend freely** and conduct their business fairly. ⁶ Such people will not be overcome by evil circumstances. Those who are righteous will be long remembered. ⁷ They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the LORD to care for them. ⁸ They are confident and fearless and can face their foes triumphantly. ⁹ **They give generously to those in need.** Their good deeds will never be forgotten. They will have influence and honor.” Psalms 112:4-9 (NLT)

As we allow God to create in us the characteristics of righteousness, generosity and compassion, we will experience God blessing us with influence and honor, we will not be overcome by evil circumstances, we will be confident fearless agents for the most high God.

Further Study

“The compassion of the infinite God is expressed to man in the blessings he bestows. The greatest, the wisest, and the happiest man that lives upon the earth is he who sees most of God in his created works; who walks most closely with him in his every day life. The man who walks with God will exert an influence that will make the world better for his having lived in it. **The beautiful, well-balanced, symmetrical character is developed by individual acts of duty.** The character is formed by the conscientious attention to the little things of life, **courteous acts of kindness unselfish deeds of charity.** Kind words make the life beautiful and noble; for in them is the spirit that pervades heaven.” Signs of the Times, December 12, 1878

“Acts of kindness. . . will bind hearts together, and will draw them closer to the heart of Him from whom every generous impulse springs. The little attentions, the small acts of love and self-sacrifice, that flow out from the life as quietly as the fragrance from a flower--these constitute no small share of the blessings and happiness of life.” The Faith I Live By, p. 267

“Your character building is by no means finished. Every day a good or a bad brick is placed in the structure. You are either building crookedly, or with exactness and correctness that will make a beautiful temple for God. Therefore, **look not for great opportunities, and neglect the present little opportunities of doing little acts of kindness. In words, in tones, in gestures, in looks, you can represent the spirit of Jesus.** He who neglects these little things, and yet flatters himself that he is ready to do wonderful things for the Master, will be in danger of failing altogether.

Life is not made up of great sacrifices and wonderful achievements, but of little things. **Kindness and love and courtesy are the marks of the Christian.** . . . You need to cherish the precious qualities that existed in the character of Jesus. . . . In our association with each other, let it be ever remembered that there are chapters in the experience of others that are sealed from mortal eyes. There are sad histories that are written in the books of heaven, which are sacredly guarded from prying eyes. There stand registered long, hard battles with trying circumstances, arising in the very homes, that day by day sap the courage, the faith, the confidence, until the very manhood seems to fall to ruins. But Jesus knows it all, and He never forgets. **To such, words of kindness and of affection are welcome as the smile of angels. A strong, helpful grasp of the hand of a true friend is worth more than gold and silver. It helps him to regain the manhood of the man.**--Letter 16, May 15, 1886, to two physicians at the St. Helena Sanitarium.” This Day with God, p. 144

Allow God to direct us when He wants us to say no

“Methods of helping the needy should be carefully and prayerfully considered. **We are to seek God for wisdom,** for He knows better than shortsighted mortals how to care for the creatures He has made. There are some who give indiscriminately to everyone who solicits their aid. In this they err. In trying to help the needy, we should be careful to give them the right kind of help. **There are those who when helped will continue to make themselves special objects of need.** They will be dependent as long as they see anything on which to depend. By giving undue time and attention to these, we may encourage idleness, helplessness, extravagance, and intemperance.” Testimonies to the Church Volume Six, p. 277

12. Customer Loyalty

There is a fine line between running a business and operating a ministry. We have items we sell to customers, therefore we are a business. We give to those in need and provide an environment conducive to experiencing God, therefore we are a ministry. In this section we will discuss customer service primarily in the way it relates to business, however, it is also relevant to the ministry aspect of the store. The fact that we are a ministry is our greatest advantage as we endeavor to be a great business.

As a business and a ministry, our goal is to provide a level of service that will cause us to stand out in the mind of our customers and clients alike. Each individual should be given the same care and attention, whether they are *purchasing* a sofa or we are *giving* them a sofa. We should not neglect the paying customer just because we are a ministry, on the other hand we should not treat someone who is receiving a donation with any less respect or attention than a paying customer; they are both equally important.

Customer Loyalty

The level of service we are going to discuss in this section is one that will gain us loyal customers, not just satisfied ones.

In his book “Customer Satisfaction is WORTHLESS, Customer Loyalty is Priceless” Jeffrey Gitomer shows us that having a satisfied customer is not enough, what we need are loyal customers; customers who will shop with us no matter what the competition does. Jeffrey offers many good ideas and shows why it is important to take a look at how we represent ourselves to our customers. A satisfied customer is just that, satisfied, they can easily go and be satisfied somewhere else. When you gain a loyal customer, you have a friend who will not only stand by you, but will be your best advertising agent.

We may think people will shop with us no matter what, however, studies show that the way a customer is treated makes a difference. Look at the numbers from a study reported on by National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*.

“When...the Verde Consulting Group tallied up the numbers in their new Customer Dissatisfaction Study, they found that one out of every two consumers experiences a problem when they shop.

Poor customer service abounds, so much so that we have come to expect it and in many cases we are not surprised when we experience it. But there comes that ‘special’ incidence that stands out in our minds and we feel we must tell everyone we know how we were mistreated.

How powerful is negative word of mouth; when someone tells us one of their ‘horror’ stories how does it effect our shopping?

‘The data shows that half of those who hear about **someone else’s** negative experience won’t shop at that establishment in the future.’

Thankfully there is a converse effect with good customer service.

‘Just as poor service generates a nasty buzz, research shows that if you have two similar stores located near each other, the one with the better customer service will have 30% – 40% more sales.’”

All Things Considered on NPR 5/21/07 – <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10305678>

Our goal is to be the ‘similar store’ with the higher sales; how is this accomplished? We start by allowing God to change our way of thinking. To change us from an ‘us against them’, ‘you better watch out or they will take advantage of you’ mentality, to the mind and heart of a servant.

The Customer is Always...

Have you heard the statement ‘the customer is always right?’ I have always had a problem with that saying because it is not true – the customer is not always right. We say the statement to remind us to put the customer first, however, since it is not a true statement we often forget its meaning. I believe the meaning becomes clear, and can remind us of our mission, if we change the last word.

The idea of replacing the last word is given to us by Dr. Dale Henry in his book, “The Proverbial Cracker Jack, How to Get Out of the Box and Become the Prize”. In his book, Dr. Henry shares with us that the customer is not always right, but that “the customer is always **served**.”⁽¹⁾ Now the phrase takes on new meaning; it is not a matter of who is right and who is wrong, it is a matter of whether or not I am willing to serve.

I do not like the first statement, because it is not true. We may not like the new statement either, because the word in the middle did not change. Our selfish mind shrinks back from this thought of ‘always.’

We are willing to serve:

When it is convenient
When the cost is minimal

A servant's heart is willing to serve:

Regardless of the inconvenience
Regardless of the cost

Example:

Upon seeing the sewing machines we had set aside in the back for Peggy to take home and check, a customer wants to know how much they are and if they work. I do not know anything about sewing machines and I am in the middle of lunch, my response from a selfish heart; “I don’t know, we have a lady who takes them home and checks them.” What I am really thinking is, “*I am busy please go away and leave me alone.*”

Customer, “Can we plug them in?” Me, “I don’t know anything about sewing machines,” with an inward sigh of disgust, thinking, “*please just go away.*”

Then it struck me, “am I willing to serve this customer?” I yielded my attitude to God and experienced His peace in my heart again. “Certainly, let’s move them to an outlet.” After setting the machines up and trying them (she knew about sewing machines), she purchased them both. Making the sale is nice, but it is not the important part of the story, the important part is God's ability to change my heart. Regardless of whether or not a sale is made, with my yielded heart the customer is served, and I have become more like Christ.

That is an example of inconvenience, what about cost? To what lengths am I willing to go to gain customer loyalty when it comes to purchased merchandise?

We received a donated hot tub spa with the assurance that it worked. We sold it to a young couple for \$800 plus \$50 for delivery. He found it needed an electrical junction box. We agreed to pay the \$135 for the part. After it was installed he had a technician check the spa thoroughly. Everything worked, except the pump motor. He called to let us know and request a refund.

I did not enjoy writing a refund check for \$800 plus tax. Then on top of that, he wanted his delivery fee back. The nerve, twice I had to send 4 guys out to his place. Then it hit me, was I willing to serve this customer? With a new attitude, I placed myself in his shoes. He wrote us a check a month ago in good faith; he had the hassle of ordering the part and paying someone to come install it. I don’t enjoy giving a refund, however, I am sure he did not enjoy all he had been through. With a changed heart I cheerfully gave him the refund check, the \$50 delivery fee, and money towards his expenses.

Is our goal to move merchandise, or gain loyal customers? How willing am I to give a refund? What if the customer makes a purchase and then finds there is a tear in the back of the sofa? I could think, “they should have looked it over more carefully before purchase!” What if they get the sofa home and the husband hates it? “She should have checked with him first!” Or I could think, “how can I use this experience to gain a loyal customer?” As I allow God to develop these thoughts of mercy and compassion in my thinking, I am growing in my ability to see to it that the customer is **‘always served.’**

When my goal is to gain loyal customers rather than sell stuff, I will be willing to do what ever it takes to gain that devotion. When we have loyal customers, we will have sales.

When I have accepted the ‘customer is **always served**’ philosophy as my own, I am open for God to direct when I am not fully serving the customer. He will grow His servant heart in me as I interact and learn that service is not only when someone has a problem, service is an attitude that permeates all we do.

Ways We Can Serve

With the attitude of a servant, all our interactions are colored with the thought, ‘how can we best serve this customer?’ What can we do that is different than other stores, how can we show we care, what makes the shopping experience in our store one of a kind?

Possible answers – We are:

Willing to give to those in need

Willing to put the customer first

Willing to make things right when a customer has been wronged

Willing to go the extra mile in providing service

Willing to negotiate

Willing to give a hassle free refund

Willing to admit when we have made a mistake

Willing to be generous

Willing to serve always

Willing to _____

How Do I Like to be Treated?

To gain an understanding of how to gain loyal customers, think of times when you have been a shopper, what makes you feel special, what irritates you?

To get you started, here are a few things that make me feel special, and some that cause me irritation.

Feeling Special:

Sales associate, “This is not my department, however, I will be glad to help you look and if we can’t find the item you are looking for I will find someone who can.”

“We are out of that size. Would you like me to call our other store and see if they have it in stock?”

A sales associate walks by and says, “Let me know if I can be of assistance!” More than what is said, it is said in a way that conveys a feeling of, “you are welcome to look all you want, however, if you have any questions, I will be glad to be of assistance.” There is a middle ground between feeling like the sales associate is hounding you, and feeling like they are hiding from you. As we are willing to serve, that middle ground becomes easier to find.

Irritations:

- When the cashier throws my credit card down on the counter instead of handing it to me.
- Not offering me a receipt.
- Sales associate perturbed at the amount of time I am taking to make a buying decision.
- Not able to find help when I need it.
- Asking a question and not caring about my answer –
A sales associate asks “did you find everything you need?” I say ‘no’, and they give no response or attempt to rectify the situation (If you don’t care, don’t ask).

▪ Price Discrepancies –

It seems like every time I go to a certain office supply store, the price posted on the shelf is different than what is rung up. Since I have become aware of this, I check the amount being rung up against what I remember the shelf tag saying. It is a pain to keep track, however, the real problem lies with the attitude of the sales associate. When I call attention to the fact that the price being rung up is different than the shelf price, you would think I had just told them their breath smelled bad and they were ugly.

Handled in the right way, I would probably pay the higher price and be happy (mistakes happen), however, with a rotten attitude, even with receiving the shelf price I am still not happy.

A Servants Heart in Action

Generosity

Our attitude determines how well our customers are served. An attitude of generosity allows Jesus to shine through us as we provide service that goes beyond what is normally expected. It should permeate the entire store, and color everything we say or do.

The following ideas are a springboard as God gives us ways to put the following verse into action.

“Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Matthew 5:48 (The Message)

When negotiating with a customer, give extra. Here is something fun to do; when a customer makes an offer on an item, give them more than they were expecting. Example; an item is marked \$50.00, before they make an offer, you have in mind that you would take \$30.00 (it has been there awhile, etc.), the customer makes an offer of \$40.00 and you say “no, we won’t do \$40.00, (pause) but we will do \$30.00!!

Look for ways to give, do not just wait until someone asks. When we have an attitude of generosity, God is able to use us to bless others, and in that blessing, we are blessed. We cannot out give God.

I was working at the register when an older gentleman came up with a few items to purchase. In conversation he said, “I would have bought more, but they are priced too high.” I said “Show me what you were looking at.” He took me back to the nick knock shelf and showed me a small porcelain bell. It was marked \$0.50. He showed me how it had a nick on the edge and we talked about his bell collection. After a few minutes I said “would you like this bell for your collection?” He said he would, I then said “you may have it, it is a gift!” He stared at me in disbelief and finally said “Are you serious? I shop at all the thrift stores, and I have **never** had anyone give me a gift. Thank you!” He continued thanking me as he left.

Fifty cents! Never underestimate the power of generosity. It does not necessarily have to be something major, which reminds us that true generosity is an attitude, a mind set of a willingness to give.

Refunds

If a customer requests a refund, give it, 99% of the time. Refunds are preferred over store credit. If a store credit is issued, it must be kept track of; a cash refund provides a clean transaction.

If it bothers you to give a refund, think about it this way, ‘it did not cost me anything to sell the item; is a refund worth the cost to gain a loyal customer?’ It is much preferred for you to be sad than for the customer to be sad.

Prompt Courteous Service

Keep the time a customer has to wait for assistance to a minimum. Greet the customer with a smile and a ‘how may I serve you today’ attitude, anticipate their need and be ready with a solution.

Example: Customer walks in the front door with an arm load, instead of making them tell you why they are here and asking where they should place their donations, you step forward, (knowing they are not bringing you their dry-cleaning,) and say “thank you, let me help you with that. Would you like a receipt?” Do not ask “may I help you?” as in ‘what do you want?’ It is obvious why they are there, serve them!

When customers bring their donations, remember, they could have taken them somewhere else. Accept their donations with a thankful heart. When you must turn down donations, do so with kindness versus the ‘how dare you bring us this trash’ attitude.

*See “10-B Floor Manager, Declining Donations” p. 194

Phone Answering

Answer the phone with a smile, let the caller feel you were there waiting for their call. You can learn to do this even if you have three different things going on at the same time. If you are with a customer and you see the phone conversation is not going to be brief, politely inquire if you may return the call or let the caller know you will be with them just as soon as you have finished serving the person you are with. Placing a customer on hold should be a last resort. If you are busy, try to find someone who can take the call. This can be difficult if you are the only one answering the phone.

Handling Disagreements

If something has taken place causing a customer to become agitated, do what ever it takes to make the customer feel special, let the customer know that what happened is not the norm and you are going to do everything in your power to make them happy. This is not the time to discuss who is wrong and who is right, it is time to make sure the customer is served.

“It’s not about right or wrong –
it’s how your *react* to and handle the problem.” (2)

Jeffrey Gitomer

When a customer is unhappy – instead of **telling them** what you are going to do, **ask them** what you can do to make things right. Many times the thing that will make your customer happy is far below what you were prepared to do. If that is the case, you are now able to go beyond what they expected, and you are on the way to gaining a loyal customer.

If a customer is irritated, do not blame their irritation on someone else. Take responsibility for what took place (even if you were not directly involved). When you take full responsibility, you set the customer at ease, they feel you are on their side and will do what is necessary to rectify the situation.

Often a customer just wants to get ‘it’ off their chest, they want someone to listen, to sympathize with their plight. When you take full responsibility, they feel they are speaking with the person who can do something about their complaint; it gives them comfort to know they have been heard. Many times, being heard is all that is required. On the other hand, do not make promises you cannot, or do not plan to keep, just to appease them.

Store Hours

Serving the customer means honoring the posted hours of operation. If your sign says you open at 10:00am, you should open at 10:00, 9:55 would be fine, but not 10:01. Yes, the customer will wait, the question is, are we serving the customer when we open later than the posted time?

If you are manning the door at closing time, waiting for the last customers to check out, and someone comes to shop, you can ask, “Are you looking for something specific?” They may say “No, I just wanted to shop. No problem, I will come back another time.” Or “Yes, I am looking for a kitchen table.” If they are looking for something specific, try to help them, if it is something you do not have, let them know, if you do have it, you might say, “We have a couple, I will let you take a quick look.” Again it is placing ourselves in their shoes, I would not want to come back tomorrow just to find out you do not have what I am looking for. On the other hand, if you have the looked for item, one more sale for the day will not hurt.

Register

When the line gets long at the register, find out what can be done to speed things along. 1) Look to see if anyone is standing in line to have a question answered. (Nothing in their hands to purchase is a clue) 2) Is there someone with just a few items and exact change? Serve them. There are few things more frustrating than to be the fifth person in line with a dollar item, standing there with \$1.07 in your hand (7% tax).

When customers are waiting in line for a long time, they begin to feel like no one knows they are there – the next thought is ‘no one cares.’ When you “check” people out who have exact change, it makes the wait easier for those who must continue to wait; not only does it shorten the line, it lets them know someone cares.

Guidelines

When adopting store guidelines, put yourself in the customer’s shoes; what would you want, what would make your shopping experience pleasurable, what would make you a loyal customer?

Examples of NOT Serving our Customer

Arguing with a customer about price –

There is a difference between discussing and arguing. Arguing is when they say there is a 50% off sign in the book department, and you say there is not.

Solution – Go with them to the book department and have them show you the sign. If it is there (forgot to take down after sale), they get 50% off. If they are mistaken, what would mercy do?

If an item is not clearly marked, and they think it is \$3.00 and you think it says \$5.00, ring it up for \$3.00, (educate those you do the marking to mark more clearly) however, at the moment, serve the customer.

Feelings of irritation –

Any feeling or outward signs of irritation when a customer asks you a question when they can see you are busy.

If you are not able to serve them at that moment, let them know in a kind way, you will be with them as soon as possible. We may feel like saying “Do you mind? Can’t you see I am busy?” Even if we do not say those words, the ‘can’t you see I am busy’ attitude can come across in our body language and tone of voice if that is how we are feeling.

It is amazing how many people will come up to you and start asking a question while you are in mid-sentence on the phone. This is not the time to teach them a lesson in manners, it is a time to demonstrate love and mercy.

Examples of SERVING our Customer

When you are out on the floor, anticipate the customers needs. Look for opportunities to be of service.

Do things without the customer having to ask:

- Turn a bed over so they can see the other side
- Get the remote for someone looking at a TV
- Plug in an organ
- Get the tape measure

When you overhear a discussion, answer their question in a polite way:

Wife to husband, “How are we going to get this home?” You, “I couldn’t help overhearing, do you know we have delivery available?”

Customer, “I have to go to the bank.” You, “We take Visa/Mastercard and Debit.”

Go the extra mile:

A customer is buying a lot of glasses. You offer to get a box to pack the glasses in so they will be easier to carry.

A customer brings back a TV. You showed them it was working when they bought it. You are sure they did something to it, yet, you give them a refund with no sign of “I know you broke it, but good old me is going to give poor you a refund.”

A customer comes in to find out that a hold tag was removed from a bed they had on hold. You sell them one that is nicer and priced higher, for the price of the original bed.

It is not about you:

When a customer is shopping, it is not about you, it is about them and how you can serve them. This little story is a great reminder of how it looks when we forget.

“...One lunch time I watched the woman in the sandwich shop spreading mayonnaise on my bread, and noticed part of her grubby work shirt was dragging across it. ‘Excuse me,’ I ventured, ‘your sleeve is in the mayo.’

‘No problem,’ she reassured me. ‘I need to wash it anyway.’” Natalie E. Walker, East Lansing, Michigan, Readers Digest, June, 2007, p. 218

Be aware:

Learn to be aware of your surroundings as you go about your duties. Does the cashier need assistance? Are there any new items on the floor that need pricing? Does someone need help bringing in donations? Be aware of who the customers are. Does anyone need help? Is there a familiar face to greet? Is there someone with a burden to be prayed with?

Awareness is the beginning of a chain reaction; when you are aware of your surroundings, you can more easily anticipate needs. When needs are anticipated, you can meet them more quickly. When you meet needs more quickly, you are building loyal customers.

Conclusion

Share with each other ideas of ways to be of service, ways to gain loyal customers. Regardless of your duties with the ministry, the responsibility rests on each of use to do whatever we can to gain loyal customers.

Every person involved with the ministry, is empowered to do what ever it takes to see to it that:

“The Customer is Always Served”

⁽¹⁾ *The Proverbial Cracker Jack, How to Get Out of the Box and Become the Prize*, Dr. Dale Henry, p. 151

⁽²⁾ *Customer Satisfaction is Worthless, Customer Loyalty is Priceless*, Jeffrey Gitomer, p. 58

Further Study

“It is the purpose of God to **glorify Himself in His people before the world**. He expects those who bear the name of Christ to represent Him in thought, word, and deed. Their thoughts are to be pure and their words noble and uplifting, drawing those around them nearer the Saviour. **The religion of Christ is to be interwoven with all that they do and say. Their every business transaction is to be fragrant with the presence of God.**” Ellen G. White, Christian Service, p. 27

The Proverbial Cracker Jack

How to Get Out of the Box and Become the Prize

By Dale Henry

Autumn House Publishing, dist by Review & Herald Publishing

<http://www.drdalehenry.com>

<http://www.adventistbookcenter.com/Detail.tpl?sku=1878951416>

Dr. Henry uses a style of southern story telling and humor to bring home his point. In his presentation of how to become a better you and be the ‘prize’, he discusses the importance of a commitment to service.

Customer Satisfaction is WORTHLESS

Customer Loyalty is Priceless

By Jeffrey Gitomer

Bard Press

www.gitomer.com

There are many books written on the subject of customer satisfaction. I highly recommend this one. Mr. Gitomer has a way of telling it like it is in his easy to read book packed with many good ideas.

13. Sell - Negotiate

Effective selling and negotiating techniques provide an environment to gain loyal customers, who will not only return to shop, but will spread the good word about your ministry. Selling gets a bad name from those who are dishonest, or twist arms to get people to buy. You can gain a good reputation by practicing selling methods that meet the customer's needs, negotiating that produces a win/win experience.

Successful selling is a skill learned through gaining a basic knowledge of the interaction that takes place during the sales process and through practical application. There are many books written to help increase your selling skills. Read a few to get an idea of the philosophy of sales. Pick out techniques that fit your personality and begin to put them into practice.

Selling – leading the client to recognize the worth and desirability of your product or service. This is accomplished as you demonstrate what your product has to offer and how it will be of value to your client. One avenue to achieve this goal is called ‘feature benefit’ selling; you show the customer a feature of your product and then help them see how it will benefit them.

People do not decide to make a purchase based on the facts. They make a purchase based on how the facts will affect their lives, how the features will result in providing them with their desired outcome.

Example: Feature – A computer system with a 3GHz processor. Benefits – your applications will run faster, so you **save** time, so you can **accomplish** other tasks, so you can **make** more money, so you can **enjoy** more of life.

The more benefits you can show, the more value you are building into your product for this customer. The value may not always be in the product itself. Look beyond the physical item and build value in the ability of the item to bring added worth to the customer's life.

“Never give a feature without a benefit.”

-Grayson Schwepfinger

It is difficult to sell (feature benefit) when you do not know much about a particular item. You may find it most useful on higher priced and unique items. However, there are some general principles that apply to any item.

When you research an item to ascertain a price, keep some of that information to share with the customer in the selling process. Give yourself a short course on the item – does this one have additional accessories? What is the quality of yours compared to others in the market? What features does it have? What benefits does it provide? Which model do you have? How much did it sell for new? How much are they selling for new currently? What is the state of the used market?

Selling takes place in the negotiating process to build value in your product, create desire, and solve concerns; these all validate your price. Negotiation takes place to reach an agreement, selling is done to support your negotiating position.

If you come to the point where you are not able to reach an agreement, it could be that you have not shown enough value in your product. If possible demonstrate more value, on the other hand, if you have shown value and you know the market, this might not be the right item for this customer, be willing to let them go.

Ideas to validate your price:

Feature – This sofa was purchased new only six months ago. Benefit – It still has many years of use.

Feature – This battery operated tub lift sells new for a \$1,000, this one is in almost perfect shape for only \$350. Benefit – We are asking a lot less than the new price for this almost new item. “This one comes with the optional swivel seat.” Benefit – Easier to use. Benefit – Do not have to pay extra for the added value.

Customer – “I’m not going to pay \$1,200 for a used bed, when I can go buy a new one for \$300.” You (selling), “I can appreciate that. However, is the \$300 bed equal quality to this Tempur-pedic®?” Or, “I understand. Is the new one a Sealy Posturepedic® pillow top?” Conveyed message – You can buy a new bed for less, however, it will not be the same quality as this one. Another response, “We also have beds for less, however, they are not as new as this one or of the same quality.”

The more value you show for your product, the smoother time you will have in the negotiation process.

Negotiating

Negotiating should not be considered a *bad* word, for without it, nothing would happen. It is also something that does not need to be feared. The customer has come to a thrift store because they are looking for bargains. Therefore, it is to be expected that many will want to negotiate a better price for themselves. We should not take offense when someone makes an offer on an item. Their goal is to make a purchase at the best possible price, however, our goal is not just to make a sale. Our goal is to assist them in their endeavor to make a purchase, as we build a loyal customer and friend.

Negotiation is something we cannot avoid, it takes place all the time whether we recognize it or not. Negotiation is simply coming to a mutually agreed upon price; it takes place whether the customer pays the tagged price, or there is further discussion. Negotiations begin when we place a price on an item, and the process comes to a successful close when the customer makes a purchase.

Approach the negotiating arena with an attitude of service and fun, it is not us against them. We provide a service, they provide someone for us to serve; it takes both. This understanding helps

us to not think of them as the *enemy*, “oh brother, not him again, every time he comes he wants a discount.” So what if he does, it does not mean you have to give it. You can be congenial and still stand your ground. However, am I **willing** to give a discount every single time ‘he’ comes into the store?

Remember our desire is to be known as the generous thrift store. However, this does not mean we have to give in to every discount request, yet am I willing if that is what God wants? God is able to guide us in each situation to know when to give a discount, how much, and when to stand firm with our price. The question is; do I continue to make the choice for God to give me a willing generous heart? There are times when all it takes is a \$1.00, is it worth giving a \$1.00 off, to gain a friend? Is it worth \$5.00, \$10.00, \$25.00? What is it worth to gain a loyal customer?

When we negotiate with dignity, an attitude of service, fun, and generosity, we are on our way to gaining Loyal Customers. *See the section “Loyal Customers”

Following are some thoughts and ideas to consider in the selling process as we keep our goal of gaining Loyal Customers ever before us.

Ask Questions.

Effective selling includes asking questions to ascertain the customer’s ultimate goals. If you do not know what their goals are, it makes it very difficult to show them how your product will help them achieve their objectives.

Michael Pink, the founder of *Selling Among Wolves*, a Biblically based sales training firm, states, “People who ask five or more questions in a selling situation, close 72% more business, than sales people asking two questions or less.”¹

Why? Because people only believe a certain percentage of what you say, more of what a third party authority says, however, they believe 100% of what they say. Therefore, “Never tell a customer something you can ask them.”²

Listen, listen, listen.

It does no good to ask the questions if you are not going to listen. To know what the customer is thinking and what their needs are you must be aware of what they are saying and what they are not saying (body language). This listening is not just a matter of hearing what they say, but listening to gain an understanding of their needs and desires.

“To give an **answer before hearing** is a foolish thing and a cause of shame.”
Proverbs 18:13³

In the selling process there will be tension.

Do not confuse tension with high pressure. High pressure is when I am trying to convince you to make a purchase regardless of whether or not it is in your best interest. Buying tension is experienced when the customer is weighing their options, deciding on the best decision, budgeting their money, and making sure they get the best deal. Tension

is also created as the customer is wondering if we will they take their offer and if not, how much above their offer will they have to pay.

Understanding tension during the negotiating process will give you the ability to deal with it and use it for the benefit of all involved. The tendency when we feel this tension is to give up and give in. When we understand that tension is a normal part of the negotiating process, we are able to recognize its presence, appreciate it, and not be overwhelmed by it.

Tension may be used by the customer to try and convince you to own their problem. We are here to assist them in solving their problems, but not to *own* them. There may be some problems we are not able to solve. As we grow in our willingness to give, we are open to the Holy Spirit prompting us when it is appropriate to give greater concessions and when we should stand firm in our position.

Establish whether or not the buyer has decided to buy, before negotiating price.

If a customer is undecided about a purchase, it does no good to discuss price. Cost is not yet the deciding factor, until they have decided it is the right color, will fit, or the husband approves.

Eager to make the sale, my associate told the customer we would take less for the bird cage. The problem was she was still looking the bird cage over, and had not decided if she wanted to buy it yet at any price. The statement by my associate caused her to begin talking price as she was still looking the cage over and finding flaws she was not sure she could live with. We negotiated a price, yet she ended up not buying the cage.

Timing is involved in the selling/buying process, when we begin discussing things that the customer is not ready to discuss yet, we get ahead of them. If the item is not going to fit her needs, or is going to need repairs she is not prepared to make, it does not matter what it cost, I could have offered it to her for free and she still would not have taken it.

Since we sell used merchandise, it is important to make sure the customer knows any flaws that exist. Once they have inspected the item and decided they can live with or fix the imperfections, and they know you understand what the flaws are, they are more willing to accept your price when you give it to them. However, if you give a bottom price and they are still looking the item over for flaws, and they find some, they will want to renegotiate.

The above example also shows what happens when we try to make price the deciding factor. We think, "If I give you a good enough price, you will buy," maybe not. If they do not really want the item, any price is too much and they may regret the purchase later.

Eliminate as many surprises as possible.

Find out as much as you can before giving your bottom price. You do not want to be hit with the surprise – after you have given them a great discount in order to move the merchandise – that they would like to leave it in the store for 3 weeks until they are done remodeling their bedroom!

When asked to give a price reduction you will be considering several factors:

- Length of time item has been in store
- Demand for this type of item
- What like items have sold for in the past
- Need for space in the store
- Changing market

Let the customer make an offer.

The item is marked \$25.00, you are willing to take \$10.00 but they may offer \$15.00. Because the reverse is true, the customers may ask “what will you take for this?” They may be willing to pay \$15.00, however, they want to know if you are willing to take \$10. One way to counter this is to say, “we would take \$25.00,” stating the marked price. This may not work every time, however, when done with humor, it lets them know we want \$25.00, now it is their turn to let us know what they want.

Before a customer makes an offer, have in your mind what you would be willing to take.

The price is \$50.00, they offer \$30.00, you immediately say “I will take \$40.00” they may respond with “would you do \$35.00?” With your quick response, you convey to the customer that you are willing to negotiate, however, you are not willing to take \$30.00. Depending on the item, you may accept their counter offer of \$35.00, or you may hold at \$40.00.

Once you have given a price, be silent until the customer says something.

If the customer does not speak immediately after you have given a price, it can be very hard to wait for them to respond, but wait you must. Our tendency is to interpret the silence as disapproval of the price, however, you cannot know what is going on in their mind, you need to wait until they speak to know. There is a list of things they could be thinking: Size, color, will by husband approve, how am I going to get it home? When you find out what they are thinking, you may have a solution, “we have delivery available,” or “let’s take a measurement.”

When a customer makes an offer you are willing to accept, do not accept it too quickly or eagerly.

Take a moment to reflect and then give your answer in a way that makes them feel special. If you jump too quickly with an answer, they may wonder if you would have taken less. You want the customer to feel good about their purchase and feel they got the best deal possible. After a pause you might say “I will do that for you.” Or give a reason “yes this has been here awhile, I will do that.” Or ask, “Are you able to take it today?”

Counter offer.

If the customer accepts your counter offer, you receive more than your bottom price. On the other hand, if you end up negotiating down to their original offer, the negotiating is not wasted; the customer now feels (because of the negotiating process) that they made the purchase at your best price and you are both happy.

Conceding price should be done with a visible reaction.

The customer does not know what is going on in your mind, just as you do not know what is going on in theirs. You are both watching each other for signs of what the other is thinking. You want to portray body language that will convey the correct message to the customer. When you wince at an offer, yet are obviously thinking, it lets them know you are willing to negotiate, however, you are not willing to take their current offer.

This technique also helps them feel good about their purchase because they feel they got your best deal.

Start with a small discount.

An item is marked \$100 and the customer offers \$50, if you immediately counter with \$75, they will feel that if you dropped \$25 so quickly, you will surely come down another \$15 or \$20. However, if you counter with a \$15 drop, two things happen: 1) they now know you are willing to negotiate and 2) you have a better chance of ending up at \$75 instead of \$50 or \$60.

The amount you concede in negotiating should become smaller the closer you get to your bottom price.

As the amount you yield becomes smaller, you send a message to the customer that you are reaching your bottom price. This encourages them to start mentally accepting your counter offer. You took \$15 off of the \$100 price, the next step may be to take off \$7. (Taking off odd amounts, also gives the signal that you are dealing with a small margin.) Next it may be \$3 you take off. You still end up at \$75, however, the customer feels like he got your best deal.

As you come down the price slide, do so with ever increasing reluctance. Ponder each request for a price reduction with mounting distress. If you slide down the hill too fast, you build momentum for the customer and they will want you to keep going.

There are more things to bargain with than money.

An effective negotiating tool is to bargain with something other than money; free delivery, matching chair, TV stand, etc. However, offering to give something other than a price reduction only works if it is something the customer wants or needs. If you offer free delivery and the customer says, "Oh, I have my truck, I can take it now," you have just let them know you are willing to take another \$25.00 (Delivery Fee) off the price. Use this tool only when you know what their needs and desires are.

An item has come in recently and you are not ready to give a discount on it.

Sometimes it only takes a little bit to make a big difference. A customer is considering a bed marked \$100 and has made you an offer of \$75. You make it clear you are not going to lower the price yet on this recently acquired item, "This bed has just come in, if it is still here in a few weeks, we will start lowering the price. If you like you can check back in a couple of weeks." If you see they are very interested in the item, but can not get past the price, you might say, "I'll tell you what, I will do it for \$95." Many times they will agree to make the purchase. The reaction can be amazing, you would think you gave them a discount greater than their original offer. Giving this small discount shows them

you are willing to be of help, yet you are firm on the price, and this week they are not going to do any better.

When your back is against the wall.

Some customers will not stop negotiating until they feel your back is against the wall (the place where you are not going to give another penny). Giving small price reductions and contemplating each one helps them reach this conclusion sooner.

Another way for the customer to realize there is no more to be given, is to refer to a 'higher authority'.

Referring to a 'higher authority' is using someone else to confer with and get permission to stand with a stated price or to accept an offer. This is someone who is perceived to have authority over the person negotiating.

When you think it best to refer to a 'higher authority' you can say, "You know what? Give me a couple of minutes and let me see what **we** can do." You then leave the customer and go to 'the back' to talk it over with an associate.

When you come back, you could say, "Today, \$75 is as low as we can go." Giving this statement after returning from 'the back,' carries the wait of a 'higher authority' even though the customer does not know who you talked with or what was said.

The person you conferred with may be an equal, however, you are able to talk with them and discuss the offer and come to a consensus on the price. They may have insight as to why you should accept an offer, or they can give you courage to stand firm with your price. Even though the person you confer with may be an equal, the effect with the customer is that when you return with an answer, it carries the wait of a 'higher authority.'

This authority can be traded back and forth as needed. If an associate is working with a customer, they can come to me to discuss the offer, and visa versa. Sometimes during the negotiation process, it is necessary for the 'higher authority' to come out and talk with the customer. Again this 'authority' can be traded back and forth as needed (not with the same customer).

This can also be used if you feel you have backed yourself into a corner by stating emphatically that you are not going to take any less. If you have a change of heart, you can excuse yourself to "check and see if **we** can do any better."

Our Highest Authority is God. The Holy Spirit has been sent to guide us and He is able to impress upon our mind the price He sees is best. The time in 'the back' may be spent listening to what God has to say on the matter. When you return to the customer God will direct in whether or not you state that you have prayed about it and you feel God is directing you to accept their offer. Many times a customer would not understand relying on God for a price. On the other hand that may be just what they need to hear. God will direct not only in what price to accept, but what to say in each circumstance.

God is able to direct us as His agents, He will impress upon our mind what price is best, perhaps even free. Many times I have been impressed to donate an item after someone has asked for a discount. As studied earlier in this manual, our purpose is to allow God to shine through us any way He sees best, including our pricing and negotiating.

The negotiating process is smoother when items have been tagged.

A price tag validates and gives legitimacy to the asking price. Therefore, it is important to get items priced as soon as possible. It is difficult to give someone a price on an item that has just come in. Even though the price on the tag comes from you, there is something about a price tag that gives the feel of a “higher authority” and therefore gives it legitimacy.

There are a couple of ways to handle a customer requesting a price on an item on the floor that has not been priced yet.

Option one: place a hold tag on the item with the customers name and phone number and tell them you will call when the item is priced. This works well for higher valued or unique items, however, not so well on standard, lower value items. For these, use option two: price the item.

Pricing the item while the customer is waiting and watching can be awkward, especially if the customer is a regular and is expecting a *good* price. When you give a price do it with decisiveness. Do not ask, “Well, I was thinking \$50?” this gives the customer the impression that you are not sure and are opening it up to what they think. Instead make a statement, “It is \$50.” Now the customer is dealing with a stated price, instead of a number you are obviously not sure about.

After you have given them a price and they are thinking about it, go ahead and make out a tag and place it on the item. This lets them know this is the ‘official’ price you are asking. If you feel like you have given them a better deal than what it should be tagged, you can mark the price on the tag \$5 or \$10 more than what you quoted them. They may ask, “I thought you told me \$20, but you marked it \$25.” You, “It is \$20 for you. However, if you don’t buy it, it is going to be \$25.” This does not work unless you actually tag the item with the higher price.

Another way to encourage a purchase, or give a discount (regular customer), is to first give the price that it is going to be tagged. Without hesitation and with firmness say, “It is \$25.” Then add softer, “But for you I will do it for \$15.” If you give them the \$15 price first, they will want it for \$10.

One of the benefits of selling used things is that you have one-of-a-kind items.

When you have an one-of-a-kind item you have the upper negotiating hand. This power will vary depending on the exclusiveness and desirability of a specific item. If it is a regular sofa that could be purchased at another thrift store, you will not have as much negotiating power. If it is a beautiful, in great condition, expensive when new, not readily available, sofa, you will be able to hold closer to your price.

What to do when you can do no more.

If you have done all you can do (your back is against the wall), and the customer is not budging, you may need to walk away. Walking away lets the customer know you have given all you can give, realizing this, they may decide to take your last offer.

Remember, the customer you are negotiating with is not the only customer who will see this item. If they do not buy, there will be someone else who will. Walking away reminds the customer that you are the one who makes decisions that affect the store, not them.

Some people need a gentle nudge to complete the buying process.

“Do you want to take this home now, or do you need to pick it up tomorrow?”

“Would you like to arrange for delivery?”

“We do accept credit and debit cards if you don’t have cash with you.”

Every person and situation is unique, you might use one technique or several in differing combinations depending on the circumstances. With experience you will gain a feel for which one or ones to use when.

Do not beat yourself up if a negotiating encounter does not go the way you thought it should. Keep in mind that education is not free, however, it is priceless. Remain flexible in your approach, have fun, and strive for that win/win experience. Allow God to give you a generous spirit and remember –

The Customer is Always Served

¹Michael Pink, *The Moses Questioning Strategy, CD 1, Selling Among Wolves*

<http://www.intheworkplace.com/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=14644&columnid=1935>

²Michael Pink, *The Moses Questioning Strategy, CD 1, Selling Among Wolves*

³S. H. Hooke, ed., *The Basic Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments in Basic English*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1949

Further Study

A Bible based principled approach to serving customers.

Michael Q. Pink, <http://sellingamongwolves.com>

Michael Q. Pink, *Telling Isn't Selling*

<http://www.intheworkplace.com/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=14644&columnid=1935>

Michael Q. Pink, *Selling Among Wolves*

<http://www.intheworkplace.com/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=14645&columnid=1935>

Michael Q. Pink, *Truth in Selling*

<http://www.intheworkplace.com/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=14646&columnid=1935>