

How to alienate customers and lose business forever

I needed pizza and water STAT

Last week, I was enjoying one perfect sunny day on the beach in Hollywood, Florida (it rained a lot in South Florida last week!). After going for a run along the boardwalk, I stopped into a pizza shop to get a bottle of water and a slice of pizza for lunch. There was an older man milling about waiting but nobody seemed to be at the counter. Finally, a guy appeared at the other end of the counter. I signaled him. He ignored me. I said "excuse me" and he ignored me. Then I said "Could we get some service down here?" and he said something like this: "in a moment, I am taking care of something else."

What else could be more important to him than paying customers who wanted to buy something? Apparently, anything was more important. Right after that, this guy picked up something and went outside to put it in storage or something. He was not helping other customers and he was avoiding helping me.

Luckily for me, there are several pizza joints along the Hollywood boardwalk, and so I walked out of this one and on to next one. There, I was served a slice of pizza and a bottle of water in a flash, and with a smile.

We all have tasks galore

Here's the thing: we all have things to do. We all have endless lists of tasks to do daily, weekly and even monthly. Since we have limited hours every day, we prioritize those tasks. For example, if you need to invoice your customers, that task comes before choosing sandwiches for the holiday party. Perhaps party planning is more fun, but invoicing brings in the money that will pay for the party.

If we want to stay in business, we need to prioritize our *current* clients and customers. We need to prioritize the work that pays, and the people that pay us. And yet, we see businesses who are so busy chasing potential customers that they ignore current ones.

Losing sales

Or worse, we see salespeople who are too busy with tasks (to put it kindly) to focus on the potential sales that are right in their store. That scenario happened to me a few weeks ago when I was shopping for some furniture. I walked into a mega furniture store whose name rhymes with Carlo, and *nobody* approached me. There were plenty of salespeople around but none of them even greeted me. Then I went up to a salesperson who was busy not doing anything and asked her where I could find medium sized media cabinets (I described a very specific need). She shrugged. She didn't seem know but what was worse is that she didn't seem care to help me. Do you think I bought anything at that store? Do you think I am ever going back there again?

In the pizza place scenario, there was absolutely no reason that guy behind the counter couldn't have come over or sent someone to take my order right away. What he "had" to do could wait an extra two minutes, but as a thirsty, hungry customer, I couldn't wait. That pizza place lost my business, not only on that day, but at any other time I happen to be in Hollywood Beach and have a hankering for pizza.

Priorities, priorities

Current business pays us now. And if we do a good job, it continues to pay in the future. Potential business must also be cultivated so we can continue to grow, but not at the expense of our current customers.

In the end, it's all about priorities.

What are your business priorities? How do you communicate to your customers or clients that they are important to you?