

Nine Old Ideas for Rethinking (Warning: Provocative)

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It's not personal; it's business -

Wrong! It's deeply personal. The attempt to remove emotions from business ignores that business is part of life and emotions are part of life, hence (by the transitive property,) emotions are part of business. Also, such thinking leads to the demotion of customers from human beings and neighbors to numbers and money signs. Don't believe me? Call your cell phone company sometime. They don't really care about people. They care about efficiency, costs and technology. You, me – we're incidental. And so it is with a great many small business owners who think it's not personal. Bring positive emotion to the forefront and you'll click like never before.

Get it right the first time -

Are you kidding? Almost no one gets it 100% right the first time! No inventor, not IBM, not the local restaurant. Promising it sounds good (though I don't know why we listen anymore) and is inherently hard to live up to. Did you hear about the Mercedes 2005 E-class recall? How about the Porsche Cayenne recall for seat belts? What about the Dell 2001 recall of 284,000 batteries? If everyone got it right the first time there would be no service bays at car dealerships, no money back guarantees and no lists including the idea. By all means, go for exceptional. Build the expectation of a small error rate into the process. Work to minimize it, of course. Set-up your client agreements so you can respond to problems in grand style when they occur – not *if* they occur - *when* they occur.

The customer is always right -

Um, no. The customer is often dead wrong. It's customary in the American culture to diagnose our ailments, and request and administer the meds we think are best. In business, what a customer often asks for is ill-suited to the real need. Most often they're addressing symptoms, not core problems. And anyway, aren't most people just interested in eliminating pain? What about achieving uncommon strength to meet new opportunities? Would you like to help create real fortitude or just get rid of a toothache? Certainly, they're the customer and so deserve great respect. Just ensure you are in a collaboration and not merely an order-taking relationship.

It's the product, Stupid -

Every single small business is in the service industry. Even the hardware store, the florist, basket lady, roofer and Mary Kay person. No one survives off products anymore. The sooner you get this, the sooner you'll get that it's the attitudes and actions around the products we sell which weaken or make our overall offerings glow. CPA? AAMCO? Coach? Kitchen/bath remodeling? Services, all. As with communication, what you do (say) is less material than how you do it (say it.) How you do something is smack in the sweet spot of service – even if you're selling or installing a product. And besides, how many of us really sell our own products? Aren't we really packaging someone else's products and information acquired elsewhere for consumption by a local customer? It's less about the product than the service around it.

Business owners need more balance in their lives -

Well, that's someone's opinion. I've been wildly unbalanced while growing my businesses. It's been far from a problem; it's been a choice. Thing is, I've also simultaneously been incredibly happy. Go for Joy more than balance. You want to work 80 hours a week? Great. Be healthy, generous in all your responsibilities and honestly happy. Knock yourself out.

Customer service is our number one priority -

For most companies, this is a flat out lie. And it doesn't go far enough. For many, service means delivering something. For example, my cell phone company makes my cell phone work properly (service delivery) and is impersonal, transactional and very often ineffective when I need help (customer service.) Clearly they are more focused on delivering cell service than creating a delighted client. Make customer delight the utmost priority. Evolve beyond the cliché and outdated notion of "customer service."

You really have to be unique!

How many CPAs are really unique? How many Attorneys? How many Coaches? What you need to be is relevant, skilled, in deep rapport with a client and determined to help. Emotion is a stronger galvanizing agent than wiz-bang features and benefits. Really connect with someone and you have them. Besides, when you're telling me how unique your service is, who is all the chatter about? You or me? Your greatness or my needs? Go for special. Special is about deep connection. Special is about solutions that are as much emotional as technical. Special puts the customer first. Special elevates - Unique blowviates.

People want to pay the lowest price -

Not true. Beware the prospect who mentions price in the first few sentences. Don't blindly refer someone angling for the cheapest price to someone in your professional circle. Unless you can grow to be the Wal-Mart of your industry, a low price strategy is dangerous. Too many small business owners think price rules the buying realm. In actuality, in survey and study after survey and study, consumers tell us that price is rarely their primary consideration. Now, if we'd only listen.

Money and cash flow are the lifeblood of all businesses -

I disagree. X gets the square. Emotion is at least as important as money. Think of your family or partner. Have you ever bought a big, expensive present to make up for a problem you caused or as an attempt to shift the emotion level up a notch or two? How successful was it in the long run, after the initial high wore off? It's the same in business. Money opens doors. People with their emotions will sprint, jog, saunter or lope through them depending on how they feel. Money is important. Feelings are too. If you don't have the skill to deal with feelings, hire it in – to both help you grow and get your company some essential expertise. Burying your head in the sand doesn't make the storm go away.

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