

# Communication... A Winning Pitch

By Cheryl Crumb



A smile can be seen over the phone.

## The Game: Customers for Keeps

In our last issue we introduced you to the Customer Relationship Diamond, the arena where the Customers for Keeps game is played. We mentioned that your product is only part of the customer's experience. What produces customer loyalty is not just the product, but more importantly, the store's services and the retailer's service. The difference between those two similar-sounding words? Services are WHAT people get: free parking, warranties, one-on-one training, free delivery, set-up and so on. Service, (no "s"), is HOW people are treated. Service is an attitude demonstrated by every employee, that the Customer is important.

Service is a people dimension. It is the attitude, knowledge, care, reliability, enthusiasm, concern, and courtesy that people bring to their jobs in the delivery of the services they are responsible for. What drives service? Two things: A value system that focuses on the customer and the communication skills that breath life into the value system.

We communicate in three ways: verbally through our words, vocally through the use of our voice, and non-verbally, principally through our body language.

Consider that people are always in a mood. It might be a positive mood of ambition or excitement. It might be a negative mood of resentment or resignation. We're triggered into moods by the slightest hint. And some of those triggers are the words we hear

others speak, a sarcastic tone or a slight roll of the eyes.

Can't, policy says, try, maybe, no, I don't know, my hands are tied, I'm really busy, impossible, I'm sorry but..... Why do such words throw a customer into an emotional place of negativity? It's the metamessage. People are "meaning-making machines". The meaning that we ascribe to what we hear and see is the "metamessage". Collectively the above words communicate the following:

- You're not important
- I take no responsibility in acting on your behalf
- It's not our fault
- I'm not going out of my way to make this work for you

Think of the customer's reaction when he questions after-sales support, and the retailer's verbal response is "No way - impossible. We can't deliver it until next week. All of our technicians are busy. I'll verify and maybe get back to you sometime soon"... and so on, and so on.

So, what is language that stimulates the customer to moods of excitement and acceptance? Power words like: Yes, will, can, commit, we, definitely, time promise...words of action, ownership, offers, empathy, caring.

Tell customers what you CAN do, before you say what you CANNOT. Speak with authority, (I will) instead of tentativeness, (I'll try). Show that you understand the effects of the decision on them personally. Consider this retailer response. "That's a good question Mr. Jones. I know it's important to you because of that upcoming party. I'll explain the situation to the manufacturer and the technicians. If we're unsuccessful with the formal route, I'll make some calls to get it informally done. You can leave it with me and I will speak with you in the morning."

Now that sounds like a service provider who makes things happen!

In correspondence and emails words are the sole medium. Re-read all your messages as if you were the customer reading them. While your school teacher would ask you to check spelling and grammar, the Customers for Keeps consultant asks that you check it for mood and metamessage.

What if you're on the phone or face to face with a customer? The voice and body

language vehicles kick in. Vocal communication includes our tone, pitch, cadence, volume, speed, rhythm, emphasis, accent, enunciation, pronunciation, projection, and force. Why so important? A smile is visible over the phone. Enthusiasm, confidence and sincerity are vocal measures.

Which brings us to body language. Our eye contact, gestures, facial expression, mannerisms, positioning, stance, dress, and movement convey powerful attitudes. Consider a service provider, wrinkled, slouching, sighing, eyes rolling, fidgeting from foot to foot, clicking his pen, other hand rubbing the back of his neck, backing away from us, feet pointed toward the exit. Our customer antenna immediately pick up indifference, anxiety, boredom, defensiveness... and he hasn't said a word!

Albert Mehrabian, author of the book "Silent Messages" said that words account for 7% of the message, voice 38% and body 55%. In other words, if there's a conflict between what is said (words) and how it is said (voice, body), we believe the "unsaid". While that may not be the intent of the speaker, it is the effect.

We can't script our body language... that would look unnatural and rehearsed. We can, however, become conscious of the impact our body has on others. What we say and do springs from our internal thoughts. The key is to plant customer-focused messages in ourselves. Consider how different the words, voice and body language would be when a service provider is thinking: " Oh, no, it's almost time to go home and here comes this bozo walking in, looking like he can't tie his shoes. Why do I get all the losers?" Compare to a professional who's thinking, "I can help this person!" You can be sure that the words, voice and body language uttered by these servers will be dramatically different.

A recent U.S. study illustrated that the # 1 reason that customers leave is not because of price or quality... it's because somebody communicated INDIFFERENCE. So remember, you are 100% in control of what you communicate. That makes you a powerful force. Be aware of it, and use it!

