

The Building of Trust with Customers... Removing the Anxiety

By Cheryl Crumb

There's the trust that exists with your spouse. You trust your best friend. Matter of fact, that's why they are your spouse and best friend. Without trust, they would be two other people populating the planet.

Trust is the cornerstone of relationships. Trust is the glue, the cement, the bond. Without trust, there is no building.

The same thing is true on a business perspective. Customers stay with business partners who they trust. Those suppliers where trust is absent are called "vendors", and we all know that when you put your coins into the vending machine and it fails to perform, the gut instinct is to kick the sucker until it works.

Trust can't live as a static word only in a mission statement. Trust is an assessment that people make when certain behaviours are present. It would be nice if we only had to do one thing to show people we were trustworthy. Unfortunately, for those of us looking for easy answers, trust is multifaceted and systemically demanding. What are those behaviours? Close your eyes and think of someone you trust. Now, identify the things they do that cause you to trust them. It's pretty likely your list will include things like:

- They accept me for who I am (even when I act grouchy and bitchy).
- They tell me the truth, even when a part of me doesn't want to hear it.
- They do what they promised to do.
- They don't fob me with excuses if they mess up. They apologize and work to move forward.
- They have my best interests at heart
- They share with me....ideas, viewpoints, plans. They don't hide themselves.
- They have a history of always being this way.

When someone in your personal life behaves this way, you trust him or her with your life, your secrets, and your family. When someone in your business life behaves this way, you trust him or her with your professional future. Distinctions like price become less important when trust exists.

Let me give you an example. Cleaning my house is the one thing about my role as Home Manager that I most like to outsource. It's not my competency, I'm lousy at it, and my time can be better spent on just about anything else. Over the years, I've experienced a lot of cleaners who thought their job was to clean my house. I thought so too, until I met Crystal Olivero, my "cleaning lady" for the past six

years. Crystal educated me on the role she can play in my life and my home. She's my Home Manager. She accepts the messes that we are. Without going into the detail of the general slovenliness of the Crumb household, she joyfully removes month-old food-caked dishes from my son's bedroom hiding places, she vacuums around me when I'm on a trans-oceanic call with a customer, and she doesn't scoff when she clears the refrigerator of blue sour cream. She accepts us. She's volunteered the breakage of a precious piece, she advises me when the team has to reschedule, and she's been upfront about personnel problems. When I was experiencing a business turndown, she came to my house and we worked out a plan to keep me superficially tidy at a budget I could afford. She gave me a hug and promised I wouldn't have to do my own toilets!

This is not a personal plug for my support network.... but the reality is that because of her customer caring approach, I've referred her to many people, and she has increased her clientele (and revenues) as a result. Great customer service gets the rewards of heart-felt referrals.

So, what are some of the actions you can take to build a trusting clientele? Try some of these:

- Show a genuine interest in your customers. Listen to what they tell you. (We go to one Italian restaurant not because of the food, which isn't great, but because the owner is always asking about my kids, my work, and he remembers what I told him from the previous visit. After a hard day, it's like dropping in to Mom's.)
- Call your customer up after they've made a purchase to see how well it's working for them. Offer to send them support materials to make it easier for them. (My chiropractor personally phoned me after some vigorous treatment resulting from a car accident, and then connected me with a colleague in Kyoto Japan so I wouldn't be suffering during business travel.)
- When you're going to be late, contact your customers immediately, tell them the truth, and take actions to minimize the pain of the delay. Don't give excuses, even if they're true. Swallow them and declare your new

promise and action. (Our living room drywall installer had to change the date, but he called as soon as he learned. He didn't blame his supplier, a "story" I was waiting for. Instead, he honestly apologized, and offered to return to our house to paint the walls - for free- to show us how seamless the transition was. It took him a couple of hours extra, but he ultimately benefited for I wouldn't drywall without him.)

- Keep your customers frequently updated on the status of your promise to them. Remember, when you become invisible to the customer, their anxiety increases. When customers are anxious, they micromanage



you. They're saying, "I can't trust you to manage my business, so I'll manage it for you." (My upholsterer would have endeared himself to me forever if only he had called me periodically and said, "The sofa and love seat are now completed". "The dining room chairs had to be reshaped as we discussed and they're going to be a beautiful set by Friday." "We're making the accent pillows. I have fabric left for 2 more. Which shape would you prefer?". Instead, I heard nothing from February until May. When the exquisite pieces finally arrived, they were beautiful but the experiencing of the waiting, "black hole", and no communication had taken its toll. He's a Michelangelo of Interior Design, but I won't use him again until he becomes a Master of Communication.

Building trust takes conscious effort, but its reward is a throng of customers who will fight to come back to you. After every customer interaction, ask yourself, "How have I demonstrated to this customer that I can be trusted?" Practice makes better!