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Customer Appreciation!!!!

Mary Kelly, PhD

People return to restaurants, grocery stores, gyms and even churches because that establishment fills a particular need for their patrons, who enjoy a variety of choices. Valentine's Day reminds us to reaffirm not only our level of commitment to that special someone in our personal lives, but also to our customers. Wouldn't it be nice if the suppliers of the goods and services we use often appreciated us the way we appreciate our loved ones on Valentine's Day? What can we do to make our customers feel appreciated?

As with that special person, we do appreciate clients 365 days of the year, but on February 14, we can take time to honor those people who help make us successful too.

A completely unscientific poll of 100 young people (ages 18 to 22) revealed a sense of uncertainty and dread regarding how to show appreciation on Valentine's Day. If you do too much, the other person might get scared off. If you don't do enough, you might be headed for a breakup, as the other person feels unappreciated. While remembering that people have choices, knowing how to achieve the right balance can be tricky in a relationship. The same is true in business relationships. When people don't feel valued, they may not return.

Ways to surprise and delight your customers:

1. Increase the value added. Include a special service or good when you can. When I order dog treats from PetExtras.com, they always toss in some extra goodies for the dogs to try. They unexpected treats cost them very little, but they serve to make me feel as though they spent a few more seconds to care about my order.
2. Deliver surprises. One of my friends throws a golf tournament every year, and on Hole #5, all of the participants know there will be a surprise photo opportunity. It may be a celebrity, a rock band, an alligator, or a chef serving up samples. It is always a surprise, and people look forward to that surprise every year.
3. Spend a little more time listening, and then deliver. Really listen to what your clients need, and then try to go above and beyond what they asked for. For example, I know many associations are having budget issues, so I offer to conduct an extra breakout session for

their conference as a bonus, or I film a promotional video just for their event, or I write an article for their publication to help promote the event. Anticipate what they want and then do it.

4. Become one of your clients' best collaborators. Promote your customers' causes and events. Contribute to their fundraisers with your goods or services. Re-tweet your clients' messages. Repost their events. Publicize their achievements. Support your clients and help them spread the word about the great services they offer.
5. Write the card. Hallmark and other card companies know that cards still work. Cards take a little effort, and that personal touch of writing your personal sentiment is still meaningful. In the age of electronic communications, cards are more appreciated now than ever. Cards with gift cards inside are really appreciated.

This February, let's celebrate and appreciate our customers!