

Ease and Do[©]

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The Forgotten Customers

Driven by an ad offering a 40% savings on a much needed piece of office equipment I ventured to the store. I found what I was looking for but it did not appear to be on sale. I asked the nearest employee if the item really was on sale; he promptly went to ask the manager. It was very apparent by the animated discussion that ensued that the manager was not thrilled with the inquiry and upon his return, the employee apologetically advised me that the item was indeed 40% off.

On my way out of the store (with the item) I came across the manager who made a point of telling me that his stock person had messed up the display, but that the employee who helped me should have known better.

Is there something wrong with this picture? Yeah, and it's all about how you treat your customers. We are all quite familiar with the formal definition of customer- a person who purchases goods or services from another; buyer; patron.¹ I refer to them as *buying* customers (in this case, me). They expect courteous service, fair prices and knowledgeable staff. The buying customers are the crux of customer service and satisfaction- if they buy, all is well. Right?

Hold on! What about the *buy-in* customers? Consider the informal definition of customer- a person one has to deal with.¹ The people that work for, in and in support of your' business; the ones who provide the service, expertise and supplies; the ones that keep your' buying customers happy and keep your' business profitable. The buy-in of your' employees keeps your' business rolling along. Take the employee and manager in this case; the employee was apparently not informed of the sale and the manager was quick to assign blame. The employee has bought in to treating buying customers well but his manager was happy to throw him to the wolves (I cannot say the manager treated me well either but...). As important as the buy-in customers are I think they tend to be forgotten; that is in a customer service sort of way. What can we do?

- **Acknowledge Your Buy-In Customers**
If you do not already do so, acknowledge that buy-in customers are a very real and very important part of business. The buy-in of your employees is as much a part of business success as the products and services you sell. It doesn't hurt to look at each of your' employees as business partners. *Without them, you are in business alone.*
- **Treat Your Buy-In Customers as if They Are Buying Customers**
You don't think twice about working hard to make your buying customers happy; it takes planning and it is something you do all the time. Why not include your buy-in customers in the planning process? Whether it is incentives, recognition, courtesy or whatever, if it works for the buying customers adapt it to fit your' buy-in customers as well.
- **Create a Continuous Buy-In-Customer Maintenance Plan**
Preventive maintenance versus as-needed maintenance; we've done the comparison and we have learned that over time prevention is less costly, less intrusive and vastly more productive. Supporting the intellect, integrity and enthusiasm of your' buy-in customers is more than incentives, recognition and courtesy. It is about giving them an opportunity to share in the triumphs and challenges the business faces; an opportunity to maximize their own potential. Institute a plan, which encourages employees to share their ideas, to challenge perceived weaknesses and to make the business greater than it is. Investing in the intellect, integrity and enthusiasm of your' employees will reap lasting rewards for all.

Don't forget, our customers come in a variety of forms. We must continue to put our best forward in an effort to attract, maintain and most important of all, to sell to our buying customers. At the same time let's not forget our buy-in customers and how valuable they are to the bottom line. Remember, without them we are in business alone; it doesn't have to be that way.

1. American Psychological Association (APA):
Customer. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Retrieved March 22, 2007, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/customer>