

Ease and Do[©]

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When the Seller Becomes a Stalker

Last year I switched from a local lawn care service to one of those major chains. The decision was based solely on cost. A year later I'm back with the original provider and you might be surprised to learn why I switched back.

It started with the up-selling; he actually got me to purchase a shrub treatment program that effectively doubled my cost. I understand why a company resorts to up-selling but this guy brought it to a whole new level. First of all the same offers were repeated over and over, despite my requests to stop. Worse still, he would emphatically point out that these extras were not only aesthetically appealing but that they were "*necessary* to retain the value and beauty of my property." Let's call it the 'hard-sell up-sell'. But when I decided to take my business elsewhere that's when things got real ugly.

When I called to cancel I told him that the service was adequate but I didn't appreciate the heavy-handed up-selling that continued despite my protestations. The response- he offered me a still lower price. Not long after, I started receiving calls asking if I wanted to use their service again, sometimes chiding my decision to go elsewhere. Each time I told him I was not interested and don't call again (what can I say I'm a nice guy). The calls continued, sometimes occurring after 9 PM and as it turns out they (and all the earlier calls as well) were from the same salesman. Most of the time I didn't even pick up the phone and on those occasions, no message was left. At last I spoke to the Customer Service Manager and told her that I felt I was being harassed. When I told her who the salesman was, she shocked me by saying "we've had issues with him before and we'll take care of it." They did take care of it; he never called again, but why did it ever get like this?

Your company's sales performance (comprised of personnel and practices) is often the *only* factor that determines whether or not customers will buy from you now or in the future. The ripple effect of my experience (or anyone like me) can be dramatic; it's likely I'll never do business with this company again and I'll surely let others know about my experience. With so much on the line could *your* company afford to have a public face like this fellow? Is there any chance you *have* someone like this?

It's critical that companies take firm control over the sales performance process. Individuals who are hired in to this essential role should be carefully screened to ensure that they have the right stuff. First and foremost salespeople should be 'people persons'. We can't train people to be passionate about serving our customers, but those who are passionate are the ones we should be looking for. We

can instill the passion for the product or service we're selling but it's of little value if our sales people are not fundamentally passionate about people, our customers.

This company made a major blunder; they were aware of difficulties with this employee and yet they allowed him to continue without sufficient oversight. Hiring the right sales people is only the beginning; we need to provide sufficient guidance and support to ensure that they remain successful and we must always be vigilant for rogue persons or activities that could undermine our integrity. When we uncover these situations we must be prepared to take appropriate measures to correct the matter promptly; ideally our customers won't be the first to bring these matters to our attention.

A final word about sales practices; up-selling is but one of a plethora of tools that is employed to up the return per customer. But too much of anything can be a bad thing and when your customer hollers 'uncle' it's time to let it go. Choose your offerings carefully and always keep in mind how you would feel if someone was selling to you as you are selling to them. There's a lot to be said for that old Golden Rule- "Treat others as you want to be treated". How does your team measure up?