

Keeping Them Coming Back for More

by Ian Smith

“The usual?” Mike asked as I slid in behind the counter.

“You’d better believe it!” I said with a wink. And why not? Who can argue with fresh grilled Salmon on a bed of steamed rice garnished with soy sauce and sweet onions? Sure, I could get fish just about everywhere—this was Seattle after all—but the Market Grill is where I put down my hard earned greenbacks.

As Mike tossed the thick strips of fresh catch onto the grill, I pondered why I liked this place so much. Was it because the food was good? Was it because they treated me nice? Was it because they knew who I was and what I liked to eat? Was it because they gave me free refills?

Actually, it was all of these things and more. Here, in this bustling metropolis, I was known by face and by name and by taste (food preference that is). Even though thousands of people would stroll by in the time it took for me to wolf down my lunch, I would still get personal service with a smile. It was as if they wanted me to come back. And you know what? They did!

Burn this into your head: the returning customer is far more valuable than the new customer. They give you business more than once, they bring friends, and they recommend you to other people. And besides all this, who wants to work with strangers all day anyway?

So how do you turn \$5.50 customers into a \$5.50 once a week customer?

1. Smile.
2. Learn their names.
3. Make them feel special.
4. Treat every problem as an opportunity.

Let’s bring it down.

Start by smiling. The last thing you should ever do is look disappointed or neutral when someone offers you money. Be happy about it. Smile and offer to help! Go the extra mile and make the customer feel welcome.

Next, **learn someone’s name** and be bold enough to use it. There isn’t anything you could say to anyone that would be more pleasant than their own name. Especially if it is said with a smile.

Once you know who someone is and have them smiling at you, **start doing something special for them.** One of the most enduring things you can do is give someone a gift. In the world of economics this often translates into a discounts or free items that may cost you, but will solidify the receiver as a faithful customer.

And finally, **treat disasters like good things!** Wake up every morning thinking “I hope something goes wrong at work so I can make some customers day!” The simple fact is that how you deal with a problem is as much or more a part of bringing the customer back as advertising or sales or specials. People want to know that they are treated with respect and that when there is a problem (your fault or not) that your top priority is making sure they are taken care of. This is worth for more to them than the green lined slips of paper they will hand you in return.

In the end customer service is really no more than treating people the way you like to be treated. You want to be known, you want to be remembered, and you want to be taken seriously. And you know what? If you take customers seriously then they will take you seriously and remember you personally the next time they cash their paycheck.

Ian Smith is a freelance writer and an individualist who has a passion for liberty, truth, and justice.

“Keeping Them Coming Back for More” is an original article by Ian Smith.

Copyright 2004-2005 by Canville Communications.