

# Customer Service! What Customer Service?

It never ceases to amaze me the number of small business owners that genuinely see the customer as a distraction or inconvenience.



I was compelled to write this article after a recent experience with a retailer in Tasmania. I had recently developed an interest in sea kayaking and bought myself a brand new sea kayak. Of course, I needed to transport the sea kayak to the various amazing places to visit where we live, so I needed to get myself some kayak attachments for the roof racks.

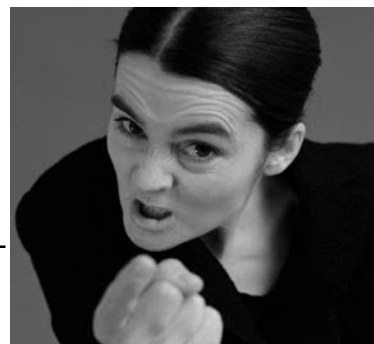


Before jumping in the car to go and see what I could find, I decided to do a quick search on the web for what products were available and also who sold them in our local area. One of the local distributors was a company called Creative Cars. I called the business and spoke to the lady there to find out whether they had what I wanted in stock. They did, so I set off to get them.



When I got there I browsed around the shop for some time waiting for some service. Whilst waiting I observed a lady serving a young couple. Then the phone rang, and she immediately walked away from people she was serving without a word and answered the phone. She was so long on the phone, the couple she was originally serving decided to just leave. As the people left, the lady on the phone gave them a look of "who needs you anyway."

After the lady got off the phone, she came over to speak to me. I asked the lady the differences between a couple different models and decided which model I wanted. I then asked the lady the price, and she told me. The price she quoted me was marginally higher than the price that I'd seen on the Internet. When I asked how come her price was higher than the price on the Internet, she replied to me in an incredibly rude tone "because that's what we sell them for!" So I replied by saying, okay I won't worry about it then, and walked out. I also got the "who needs you anyway" look.



The thing is it wasn't the money. Had she just told me well it costs a little extra for transport or some such thing I would have been quite happy to pay the price and she would have got a sale.



Many might be thinking she just might be having a bad day, and unfortunately that wasn't the case I have been in that shop before and received similar treatment, and also been warned by a number of other people to shop somewhere else.

The issue here was simply this business owner did not know the purpose of her business. She had never taken the time to

really get clear on what the purpose of her business was. I believe that there are three parts to the business. The business owner, the team and the customer, and these three areas of the business must be prioritised in the appropriate order. In my experience I've found that the majority of small business owners prioritise the customer as number one, often to the detriment of the team and the business. (Obviously in the example above the customer was not prioritised number one).

I suggest the number one priority is the business owner. By that I mean the business owner must prioritise in such a way that ensures that he or she is on top of their game mentally, emotionally and physically. They must look after themselves physically so they can perform at the top of their game, but also they must continually skill themselves up in the areas of communication and leadership.



The next priority is the team or team members. The business owner must have a clear vision about what sort of environment they want to create for the team. In other words, the benefits of working in this environment for the team, as well as the expectations for team performance.



Knowing that having a clear understanding of it creates consistency in the leadership's actions, decisions and behaviours.

As far as the customer is concerned, the business owner is looking after themselves and ensuring that the team members are supported, happy and fulfilled, by default the customer will be looked after like a VIP.

At the end of the day this is all about personal responsibility. If you take responsibility to continually refine your skills, get clear on what you are trying to accomplish with your business and what its priorities are, and have a measurement and monitoring system to ensure that you are running your business on track, you can't help but be successful. By this I don't mean that you won't ever have any challenges. In fact, you will always be having challenges, but the secret is how you rise to meet those challenges.



So here are some questions for you to consider.

**Question 1:** What really is the purpose of my business for me the business owner?

**Question 2:** What sort of an environment do I want to create for my team, and what benefits do I want this business to provide for them?

**Question 3:** Have I communicated this clearly to my team, and have I created a two way forum to monitor and measure our effectiveness in sticking to this plan?

