

DOING BUSINESS: Customer Alert
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Author:

Monica L. Wofford
Owner, PresentersPlus, Inc, Public Speaker
PresentersPlus, Inc
PO Box 683316
Orlando, FL 32868
www.presentersplus.com
monica@presentersplus.com

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Service is Just What We Expect

How many times have you entered an establishment and the service you expected was missing, nonexistent, or way different than what you were looking for? The truth is actually – never, or well, almost never. Within 7 seconds the expectations we have of those we do business with are begun to be fulfilled, or not. It is true for the high priced salon and the super cheap hair cut place, the fancy document company and the Kinko's, the special occasion restaurant and the Subway. These places set our expectations with advertising, locale, previous experience and price, and in the first few seconds, they are met, primarily because we now expect service levels to be so low, many places are right in line with that level of service.

All our lives we have been told “you get what you pay for”, “service with a smile”, and “the customer is always right”, right? The first may still be true in some circles; the second is now hard to find, and the third is not only untrue, but laughable. These “truths” have been so often contradicted or ignored in the servicing of us, as consumers, that we no longer believe that good service or quality is consistently what we

are going to get. Thus, when we shop, dine, order, patronize, a place of business, our already low expectations are almost never exceeded.

Contrary to the above, sometimes we do have higher expectations or more urgent needs or demands. These are reflected in our tone, body language, and choice of words upon making the request to the business person, owner, or service clerk. Sometimes the person will pick up on our signals of tone, body language and so forth, and work extra hard to overcome our preconceived expectations, but this is rarely the case. More commonly, the person sees us as being needy and becomes frustrated, thus perpetuating the belief that service in many businesses is simply not a priority any more.

Ralph Waldo Emerson long ago stated that “What we think about all day long is what we become.” The same is true for what we think about before we do business. If we think an experience is going to be bad, our brain can assume we are the expert on how things are supposed to be, and tell our body to react accordingly. The same is true for when we believe we are receiving bad service. The thoughts tend to come out in verbal, as well as, non-verbal ways, easily visible to the service person, waiter, store clerk, or salesperson, if they are paying attention. IF...

What we react to frequently is that businesses seem to rarely teach employees how to go the extra mile anymore. In many cases, we are lucky if we receive an extra inch of special treatment, much less a mile. Special service is seen as meeting the customer half way and with this knowledge we approach vendors and merchants using a series of the subtle or not so subtle communication signals.

In addition adults like to be right in many cases and sadly, many tend to delete or ignore those things that do not align with what we believe to be right. If we believe or

expect the service we are about to receive to be the pits, that is what we will be looking for and responding to if it exists. Thus we send subtle non-verbal cues and use words that can prompt a vendor or merchant to confirm what we already believe. This is true for both positive and negative beliefs. We see what we see and we only know what we know.

The next time you work with a vendor whom you believe is going to “pull the wool over your eyes”, take note of the guard you put up and thus, the reaction you get. The next time you do business with a merchant who you believe does good work and treats customers well, take note of the mistakes or initial discourteousness that you overlook in trying to affirm your original beliefs. In either case, what you expected is usually what you get and what you expected is almost never missing. What is it exactly that you expect?