

The Other CRM – Customer *Respect* Management

Here's a business strategy that can have a huge impact on your sales, and it doesn't require a large investment – no fancy software to buy and you don't have to hire companies to implement it. As a matter of fact, you're already doing it. The question is: are you doing it well?

This critical business tool is CRM: Customer Respect Management. It's different than Customer Relationship Management, which is an integration of people, process, and technology that provides seamless integration of every area of business that touches the customer. Make no mistake, Customer Relationship Management is a great strategy for large corporations which present multiple faces to the customer. But regardless of your size, scope, or business, every company needs to excel in Customer Respect Management.

Customers are the very foundation of why you're in business. They purchase your goods and services. Without customers you're out of business faster than you can say, "May I help you?" Customer Respect Management means holding the customers in the highest esteem and having a great appreciation for them. It's not just a strategy. It's an action. It's what Profitable Retailers do on a daily basis.

Almost all companies believe they're high in Customer Respect Management. I wish this were the case. If it was, every time you went shopping would be a great experience. You would leave stores feeling good about your experience. Unfortunately, as customers we more often feel under-appreciated and not respected by many of the companies we do business with. Ask a group of retail executives and owners if they respect their customers and everyone will raise their hand. Ask a group of customers if they feel respected by retailers and considerably fewer hands will go up. Actions do speak louder than words.

I have to stop here for a minute with a rant: Store owners who consciously or unconsciously allow employees to park in the best spots closest to the door should be ashamed of themselves. One day I went to the Starbucks® down the street. The first four parking spaces were taken so I pulled into the fifth, walked into the store and saw four employees and no customers in the store. Shame.

The Stop & Shop® grocery store across from Starbucks is the same. When the store opens at 7 a.m., half of the parking spots nearest the doors are taken and there's not a customer in sight. Shame.

These are spaces that could be better used by the elderly, by a parent with young children in tow, or – heck! – me. I'm your customer. But no, employees who haven't been trained to respect the customers enough to walk an extra twenty to thirty steps twice a day take the best spots.

In small towns across America, including my own, retailers complain that customers don't shop in their stores due to lack of parking. All too many of those same retailers walk out and feed the meter in front of their stores so their car doesn't get a parking ticket. Shame.

Consider the lost sales from a customer who had planned to come to your store, but gave up when there was not a handy parking space. Maybe that customer had just a limited amount of time, and when he or she saw that no space was readily available, that customer just kept driving.

It's ironic that retailers spend millions of dollars on Customer Relationship Management when the bigger problem is Customer Respect Management. I would put up signs in front of all the close parking spaces that read, "Reserved for our best customer: You."

Profitable Retailers know that strong and lasting relationships of all kinds begin with respect. Customer Respect Management doesn't require a large investment of time or money. It just requires that you respect your employees, and then let your actions as a leader speak as loud as your words. Ensuring that your store is high in Customer Respect Management will guarantee a successful and lasting relationship with your customers.

About the author: Doug Fleener is a veteran retailer with over 30 years of hands-on retail experience with world-class retailers including Bose Corporation and The Sharper Image. He has also owned and operated his own specialty stores. As the Director of Retail for Bose Corporation, Doug was instrumental in developing the unique and engaging retail methods that have become the industry's benchmarks for experience based retailing and superb customer service.

Doug is now president and managing partner of Dynamic Experiences Group LLC, a Lexington based retail consulting firm dedicated to helping retailers create unique customer experiences that results in higher sales and profits. Learn more at www.dynamicexperiencesgroup.com or call Doug at 866-535-6331.

Fleener also shares his knowledge of experience based retailing in a series of custom key notes and workshops designed for stores, businesses, corporations, non-profits, and trade associations of all sizes. His casual style and quick wit make him not just a crowd pleaser but also an incredible motivator, encouraging people to take action and deliver extraordinary experiences to customers and employees alike. Learn more at www.dougfleener.com.