

5 Keys to keeping your customers

Today there are all sorts of lists. I recently sat with some friends and we talked about how small business owners can help keep their customers happy. Keeping customers happy means keeping them as customers.

We could have come up with a list of ten or even 20. But this list is really a reminder list. There is one tip to practice each week. (There is an extra tip that is more of a principle.) In the box below, all of the tips are listed. Cut the list out and tape it to your monitor. Then pick a day of the week. Let's use Thursday. On every Thursday, do what that week calls for. That means, on Thursday for Week 4, call up a client to say Thank You for their business. Nothing more than that. Be sincere in telling them why you appreciate their business. Next week, start over at Week 1 with a new set of customers.

Anticipate Problems and Offer Solutions

The conversation started because of interaction I had with an internet Auto Parts company, [PartsTrain](#). With some auto parts, when you buy a part, you also get charged for the core. That is the old part that the company can refurbish if you send it back. I sent a note to their support team because I needed to know how to return a core item. I also included a note about the purchase process on their site.

About 1 hour later, I got a phone call from support. Winston wanted to talk to me to be sure he understood my comments. He then offered a couple work-arounds for future purchases and promised to pass the issue on to his IT team.

While I was on the phone, I got an e-mail from a different part of support. They told me how to find the return authorization. But they went farther. They went ahead and issued two authorizations, including one for a product that had not shipped yet. The second authorization was a promise that it would be updated after I received the part. When I did get the actual part, I also received the authorization along with instructions on how to process them. Clearly, PartsTrain understands going above and beyond to keep customers.

Maintain Personal Relationships

A Pew Charitable Trust survey completed in 2000 found that many Americans use the internet quite regularly to stay in touch with family and friends. But think about the last time you talked to somebody after you forgot to return a phone call. Digital tools help, but there are times when only face to face, or at least phone, conversations are super important.

I got a call the other day from a friend that had changed jobs and is now a financial advisor. I feared the worse. What John (his real name) said was he was just calling because he remembered us talking about an event I was to attend. He wanted to know how it went. WOW. We chatted for a minute and then said goodbye. Afterwards, I felt great.

I am suggesting a two step method. One, call your customer and say Hello. Get to know a little about them, their business and their family. It is great if you can record the names of spouse and children. Birthdays are excellent also.

Put that information to use by recording it in a CRM tool or some other tickler file. Then send a card every once in a while. A hand written note is especially memorable these days. One way to do that is

with **Share A Card Now**. A friend named Robin operates the service that you can use to send a heartfelt card that you order electronically. www.shareacardnow.com will let you choose a card and text and have it delivered. You can even use their mailing list and reminder functions. This is a great blending of the digital and tangible worlds.

Share Information

I got an article link in an e-mail from a friend recently. It wasn't about me. It was about a company in town that affects another friend. Sending that article showed me that Eric cared about me. He knows I can use it next time I talk to Steve. Aren't there times that you are reading the paper, a book or news online and you say "Wendy should really know about this"? Send Wendy that article to show you are thinking about her.

Say Thank You

This one is for my mom. I don't think I can count the number of times she told me to "Say Please and Thank You". Well, it still works. And it is good for business.

When you offer thanks, be specific and tell people how it made a difference to you. "Thanks, attending that meeting allowed me to finish that proposal. It helped me get a new customer". Sending it in a card is more powerful than sending e-mail. The warm feelings generated by a personal call are always worth the effort. Don't forget to follow up with a card or certificate. Something a customer can hang on the wall keeps your company in front of them all the time.

Be Honest With Your Clients

Here is another point that doesn't need to be said, but can't be overstated. To keep customers, keep informed customers. Tell them the good news and the bad news, the sooner the better. Nothing loses a customer's trust faster than finding out that you have not been up front with them. Nothing keeps a customer loyal like feeling they are a partner, in good times and bad.

The Challenge

Post the blue box on your computer monitor. Make sure you see it every Monday morning. Each Monday morning, take two customers from your client list. On the first week of the month, look for a problem you can solve for them. Next Monday, pick two more and call them personally. Third Monday, share something with two clients. At the end of the month, say thanks to two more clients. At the beginning of the next month, start the cycle over with two more clients.

I think building this habit will go a long way to keeping customers. Tell me what you think at MartyVik@MyTurtlePond.com. Take Care.

See the Customer Tracker Table on the next page.

Print this box and tape it to your computer.
First Monday of the month, select 8 customers and put them in the “Customer” column.
Every Monday, follow through with the actions.

Monday	Action	Customer
Week 1	Look For Problems To Solve	
Week 2	Call Somebody Personally	
Week 3	Share Something Valuable	
Week 4	Say Thank You	