

The YEBDC Small Business Information Column

by Sue Gingerich, Business Advisor

"How Knowledgeable Should Your Sales Staff Be?"

Recently, a customer purchased a number of items from a very successful business. This business has built a reputation on having a wide selection of quality products. The customer was happy with the price he paid for the purchase and walked away satisfied. Satisfied that is, until he started using the products.

Apparently one of the products that the customer bought, was NOT performing to his expectations. Was there a problem with the product? NO, actually not. The problem was a lack of knowledge about the capabilities of the product, by the salesperson that sold it to the customer. The problem was also caused by the salesperson's inability to actually uncover the needs of the customer. Had the salesperson actually taken the time to understand the customer's needs, he could have easily traded this customer up to a more expensive model, with more features.

How would you have handled this situation?

A customer ordered a part over the phone. He asked for what he thought he wanted and also, thought he explained why he needed it. The clerk said, "Yes, I have a product that will do the job." The customer received the product, installed it, but-- (yeah, you guessed it) it didn't work. The customer called the company back, explained what happened, and their reply was, "Oh that product isn't meant to work like that, it's meant to..." Unfortunately, the policy of the store is such that, because the item is out of its original wrapper, it cannot be returned. The customer is understanding, but obviously disappointed.

How would you have handled this situation?

Believe it or not, both these situations happened to the Same Customer, at -- the Same Business! This is a case where the saying, 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,' came from. Obviously, the salespeople's 'little' knowledge, will cost this company 'big' time. The customer's original purchase was over \$4,000.00. How quick do you think this customer will be going back to this business?

Too often, businesses think the cost of product training sessions is too high. It might cost a hundred or two hundred dollars a day for each employee! OH, NO! Yet, compare that with a \$4000.00 lost sale. Consider how many employees we could train for \$4,000.00?

If businesses want to keep customers, they need to keep them happy. One way to keep customers happy, is to satisfy them, by ensuring they get the right solution to match their needs. The only way to ensure that they get the right solution, for their situation, is to ensure knowledgeable staff, who know how to uncover the true needs of the customers.

If you have a small business and have a question or problem that you think The YEBDC could help you with please call or write to: The Yellowhead East Business Development Corporation, Box 249, Sangudo, Alberta, T0E 2A0
1-800-556-0328 or 1-780-785-2900, e mail: yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca, or access our Website at: www.yebdc.ab.ca

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