

How can I use customer service to secure more business?

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After 30 years in the painting business I've discovered being an accomplished painter, putting forth your best effort and having the ability to paint well are fine – if your plan is to simply work by yourself.

However, if your goal is to own and operate a successful, six-figures-a-year painting business, as I do, providing a sought-after service, you must communicate effectively and get along well with people from all walks of life. As a business owner, the responsibility to get along with customers, vendors and employees is all on you, my friend. And it requires good "people skills."

Business owners who possess great people skills or emotional intelligence have a huge advantage. Some painters would rather let their work speak for itself at best or are downright surly at their worst. If you haven't been around a successful business owner before, you may not be aware of this simple rule of the road: People do business with people they like. As an employer, people tend to go to work for (and keep working for) people they like. So, it pays to become a likable person. Become the kind of guy homeowners award the job to even if they know you're not the lowest bidder. When they like you, they will have confidence in you and your ability to do a great job. If they like you and your work, they'll be happy to recommend you to their friends, family, neighbors and co-workers.

It doesn't matter how big your company is. It doesn't matter whether you employ four people or 40. The customer's first impression of your company is formed based on how you present yourself. No one is born with great people skills. By being aware of your actions, your emotions and how you speak around others, you're headed in the right direction. Theodore Roosevelt said, "The most important ingredient in the formula for success is knowing how to get along with people."

I've had many customers tell me after receiving all the bids to paint their homes that they were undecided as to which company to hire. They chose to hire my company because they liked the idea of working with someone who listened to the concerns and clearly explained their system for painting their homes. It made them feel much more comfortable. It is vital to convey your thoughts and ideas clearly so your customer understands the process and the results they can expect.

Develop the unshakeable confidence in the

customers' minds that you can and will do a great job for them. This means in your heart of hearts you know your services provide great value for the money. A mentor of mine used to say, "Terry, practice the future." That means practice in your mind acting as if you already are that six-figure income painter. Step into the role of being a blue jeans executive. One who is confident – not arrogant – and the kind of great person everyone enjoys sharing a beer with at the end of the day.

If you've never been around business owners, you may not be aware how a highly successful, self-made business owner acts. My advice? Start watching them. Get to know them. You'll discover in the vast majority of cases they're some of the nicest people you'll ever meet. Why? They had to develop great people skills to build their businesses up to where they are today.

The stereotypes on TV and in the movies are wrong. You know the ones where the business owner slams his fist on the desk, barking out orders while the veins on his neck bulge out. His employees scurry in fear to do his bidding. It's a fiction created by Hollywood because it makes great drama.

The truth is most self-made business owners out there are great guys and gals who have perfected their people skills along with their business skills. Why? They had to build momentum and cash flow, and great people skills can help your business immeasurably. Plus, it doesn't cost a nickel in advertising or marketing costs. **APC**

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