

Shore Up Your Relationships—They'll Keep You in Business

*By Judith Filek—President
Impact Communications, Inc.*

High performing companies know the value of building relationships with their customers and vendors. Relationships drive growth and revenue. They carry you through the tough times and may even give you an edge if there are shared intimacies. However, while we know this on one level, often our daily tasks consume us, and we don't pay enough attention to the little things that affect deepening or growing the relationship. Here are some things to consider.

- **Be a good listener.** Building a relationship really starts with listening. The temptation is to use opportunities with customers to push a product or service. Instead, use those times to listen. The more you demonstrate you are listening by nodding and acknowledging, the more the other person feels you care and are interested in learning more about them on both a business and personal level.
- **Little things count.** Send your customer a white paper or an interesting article about a trend affecting his business. For example, if you have read an analysis of how consumers are making buying decisions today, be sure to pass it on. It shows you care and have the person's best interests at heart. It also makes them see you in a different light.
- **Call them, especially when it's not time for an order.** Periodically, touch base. Let your customer know you have been thinking about them. Pass on any comments you have read or heard about the individual or the company. People love applause and like to be noticed. Devise a system to ensure that not too much time passes before you connect with them.
- **Invite them as a preferred customer.** If your company is offering special web based training or conducting a focus group, be sure

to include them. People like sharing their opinions. They also appreciate learning new things, especially if they are a small or mid-sized company and would not have been able to afford sending people to training.

- **Be responsive and call them back really quickly.** When people have a relationship, they will turn to you for help. When your customers call, respond the same day and make resolving their issue a priority. When a quick resolution isn't possible, let them know you have it on your list and will address it as soon as you can. Be sure to tell them you will personally oversee the situation or find the answer.
- **Don't get defensive.** In any relationship, whether it is a work relationship or a personal relationship, there will be issues. When problems arise, listen, reserve judgment and take responsibility, even if you are not to blame.
- **Go the extra mile.** Don't just meet the customer's needs, exceed them. Do more than was asked and you will cement the relationship. The old adage of "Under promise, but over-deliver" couldn't be truer.
- **Be honest.** Sometimes your product or service is not a good fit. Tell them. What permanently kills a relationship is the sales person who sells a product that doesn't offer what the customer was expecting. Also, if you don't know the answer to their question, say so.
- **Don't take them for granted.** Just because the person has given you business in the past, don't count on them to automatically continue. Today's customers are savvy and expect to be treated with respect.

Relationships need cultivating, just like a garden. Pay attention to the tips suggested and you will build strong, enduring business relationships.

***Question:** Think about your relationships with your customers. What do you do to develop them? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their presentation and telephone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.Impact-CommunicationsInc.com.