

# Here's how to Gain Customer Loyalty

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Picture for a moment your customers on the other end of the phone line. Whether they show it or not, many of your customers are highly stressed. They feel tremendous pressure from their own management team to do things faster or cheaper. When they purchase from your company, they do not want to add stress to their day. They want their interaction with you to be hassle-free. Donald Cooper in his audiobook, “Human Marketing: How to Become the Preferred Supplier of What You Sell,” says that you will become the preferred supplier to the extent that you understand the customer’s stress better than your competitors and can make it go away better than your competitors. Inside sales reps need to examine, therefore, whether they diminish or escalate customers’ stress levels if they want to achieve customer loyalty.

So how does an inside sales rep cause stress? When a company does not have product available, customers get upset, particularly if this is a reoccurring problem and causes the customer’s own business to suffer. For example, if Company X needs to re-order 5000 fasteners for their stores in their central region, and you can’t deliver in a timely manner, the customer will feel very pressured from their own management team to correct the situation. Many of them will be forced to look for an alternate supplier, even if your pricing or product is terrific.

When customers are interested in making a purchase and the rep isn’t knowledgeable about the product or the competitor’s version of the product, they feel the call has been a waste of their time. They also wonder why a company would allow you to be their spokesperson.

After the sale is complete, customers expect that the service they receive will be stellar. They base their loyalty to a company around the service they receive when problems occur. If there are long wait times before customers get technical support or if they do not receive a call back quickly from their rep, customers question whether it is worth it to do business with your organization.

To make interactions with you stress-free, an inside sales rep must do a number of things.

1. **First, truly understand your customers and the environment under which they exist.** Ask them some questions to ascertain correct information. Take some notes. It is okay to come right out and ask them directly what is stressing them out. It demonstrates that you take the importance of their situation seriously. In addition, once you know this information, you can come up with solutions that truly help them.
2. **Develop personal relationships.** While talking about your product, learn what the customer’s outside interests are. Share commonalities. Customers remain loyal to reps when they feel the rep knows them and their organization, regardless of your pricing.
3. **Know your products, and the competitors.** It is not okay to only know a few products. If your company has an extensive product line, commit to learning two new products each week. Also, find out how your product is different from your competitors. Don’t guess. Know.
4. **Be consultative.** Too often reps push product, instead of a solution. If the rep acts as a consultant, versus a salesperson, the rep will gain the customer’s trust. Even if the customer cannot make a buying decision this year due to cutbacks, you will be the first person she will call when monies become available.

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5. **Respond quickly to customer issues.**

When customers have questions or want something fixed, they want it now. The quicker you return a call, the better. Make sure that if you are not available, your voice mail message lists a second alternative. Customers love when you give them your cell phone number or your beeper number. It is even a good idea to give them your home phone number if you feel they will not take advantage of it. By making access to you easy, you demonstrate that you value them and want to help them as quickly as you can.

6. **Be sensitive.** Listen to your customers. Put yourselves in their shoes. See things through their eyes, not yours. When you focus on your customer's world, you can offer creative solutions and begin to exceed their expectations.

When you understand your customers' level of stress and respond in an appropriate manner, customers will be relieved they can rely on you and your organization. They will look forward to doing business with you. Not only that, they will tell others. Stress-free selling is a powerful advertising tool that distinguishes you from your competitors.

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