

# Building Customer Loyalty

By Judith Filek- President  
Impact Communications, Inc.

Customer loyalty isn't dead, but it is getting tougher to earn it. According to JoAnna Brandi, organizations constantly need to work on what affects customer satisfaction before the competition snatches their biggest customers. Her short book, ***Building Customer Loyalty***, offers twenty one suggestions for anyone interested in turning their customers into raving fans. Here are a few of her ideas.

The first thing an organization can do to build customer loyalty is to survey their customers after a transaction through post cards, formal surveys or electronic mail. Once they find out what the customer is expecting, they should compare it to what the customer is getting. Then, they should fix the gaps. Furthermore, they ought to develop quality standards based around these expectations. Everyone in the organization should adhere to the philosophy that good service isn't a hit-and-miss thing. It's an every-time thing.

Brandi says wise companies think of their customers as their suppliers. They train their customer service reps to listen for valuable information so that the right products and services are available at all times to make the customer happy. They also listen for emerging trends or opportunities, as well as new ideas for products and services. They never guess at what their customers want. They ask.

The second thing a company needs to do to insure customer retention is to be responsive. When things go wrong, a company must make the customer feel secure by providing prompt service and great follow-up. There cannot be long wait periods. Call backs must be done within a short period of time, and the company must always be working on improving their processes, standards and technology so that they can provide a level of service that is unparalleled.

Since customer loyalty is about building long term relationships, reps must demonstrate that they are trustworthy, understanding and helpful. Consequently, they must be highly trained on customer service skills and product specifications. They cannot inadvertently give misinformation. If they promise something, they have to deliver. If they don't know a product, they have to be willing to learn.

Finally, Reps must show they value their customers by actively listening to their feelings and by bringing concern into the tone in their voice. Surveys show that 68% of customers leave because of the perception of indifference. If reps go "above and beyond" for their customers, they will develop lasting relationships. If they get to know their long-term customers on a personal basis and take note of their special needs, they build customer loyalty. It's the little things that count and add up. People not only make decisions with their heads, but with their hearts.

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