

Pride in business

Get your employees to understand that business is an activity of which they can be proud, and everyone will be better off. Dr Ian Brooks explains.



For the 28 years I have had the good fortune to live in New Zealand, I have had the feeling most New Zealanders have a negative view of business. I get the impression that deep down inside, Kiwis believe if someone is succeeding in business, they must be exploiting or cheating their customers. Even businesspeople think this. Perhaps this is why so many owners, managers and staff are quick to discount and reluctant to on-sell, up-sell or cross-sell. Or even try to close the sale! I often see mystery shopping reports where an overwhelming number of staff did not ask for the sale, even after spending nearly an hour with the customer. We need to change our view about business if we want to be more assertive in selling, and therefore more successful in business. It is very hard to sell a product or service you do not believe in, but it is even harder if you do not believe in the profession we call 'business'.

This change in attitude starts by understanding that business is the activity of creating value. Customers do not want products and services – they want what products and services can do for them. Moreover, value is benefits minus costs. You can only succeed in business, therefore, if you can provide your customers with something they see benefits them more than the costs they pay to get those benefits. That is hardly exploiting or cheating anyone! Looked at another way, business is not about providing products and services – it is about helping customers. In other words, business is not an exchange of goods and services for money. It is a social activity between people where one person profits because they provide a benefit to a second person.

To take this idea one step further, ask yourself what business you are in? In my experience, many people answer that question in terms of their industry. They say I'm in retail, manufacturing, IT, for example. Others answer in terms of their products or service. For example, "We repair cars." "We

sell furniture." These answers are correct, but they miss a key point – that businesspeople succeed only if they can attract, make money from and retain customers. All of us are in the customer business. No matter the industry or the activity we are engaged in, we will succeed only if we have customers. The means by which we get customers differs, but we all need to attract, make money from and retain customers.

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As a former clinical psychologist, I know people often think about what they are doing and forget who they are doing it for. This is dangerous if you're in business for this one simple fact: 100 percent of your profits come from your customers! In fact, unless you are losing money or borrowing money to expand, then 100 percent of your revenue comes from customers. The money to operate your business, market your products and services and the money to pay everyone's wages comes from your customers.

If your people think about being in the customer business, then they might feel differently about their jobs. Help them to understand they do not come to work to stock shelves, manufacture products, deliver a service, do administrative tasks or make sales. They come to work to help people. Explain to them people want to do business with your company because they have a problem they want to solve and they think your company can help them. If you do solve their problem for them, and they

enjoy themselves while you do, they will feel happy, relieved and grateful. They might even be excited. And, you will have been the person who brightened up their day, the person who made a difference to their life that day! Can there be anything more worthwhile or satisfying than that?

Suggest to your teams that on their way to work they think about how they can help the people who come to do business with you. Also, suggest they think about this: If they and your premises do not look professional, people will not come in and they will not have a chance to help. If they do not approach customers or answer the phone quickly, customers cannot give them the opportunity to be of assistance. If they do not relate to customers by being friendly and personable, customers will not trust them and allow them to help. If they do not ask questions and listen to understand their needs, they will not know how to help them. If they do not show customers the various solutions you have and then close the sale, customers will walk out empty handed and they will not have helped them. They will just have wasted their customer's time.

But what about your people who work in production? If they do not make a quality product in a timely fashion first time, every time, then your customers will not get the solution they expect delivered on time, in full, in specification, at an affordable price. And the people who work in administration? Their customers are the frontline teams and if they do not help their internal customers, the frontline teams cannot help the paying customers.

If this makes sense to you, call a team meeting and discuss these ideas. I guarantee if your staff understand business is an activity of which they can be proud, everyone will be better off.

Dr Ian Brooks (www.ianbrooks.com) is a leading expert in customer care and chairman of the NZ Association of Customer Excellence.