

Delivering Exceptional Customer Service

by **Tosha Powell**

Have you ever experienced a problem with a product or service that forced you to call customer service? Have you had a bad experience on the phone with a customer service representative? The American Hereford Association (AHA) staff completed an in-house seminar designed to enhance skills on “How to Deliver Exceptional Customer Service.”

“Speaker Dave Pollard of Fred Pryor Seminars, Overland Park, Kan., was energetic and entertaining with fun acronyms, hints and tips on ways to keep customer service excellent for AHA members,” Michelle Clogston, Creative Services coordinator, said.

Customer service is a daily task for Hereford staff and members. Cattle buyers serve as customers to breeders, while breeders serve as customers to the AHA staff. At that point the triangle of customer service has just begun.

Many tips presented during the seminar could also help AHA members improve their customer service. Here are a few tips:

P.M.M.F.I.

Those five letters are key to beginning any business deal. “Please Make Me Feel Important” works both for the businessperson and the customer. The following are five simple steps to use to build a good rapport with customers by making them feel special:

- **Greet customers immediately.** Customer service representatives need to let customers know the representatives are paying full attention to them. Get their names and then repeat

it back to them making sure they were heard correctly.

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Ask questions that can’t be answered with “no” or “yes.” This approach gives an opportunity to hear the underlying problem.
- **Acknowledge emotions.** Notice whether the customer is upset, concerned, happy or pleased. This concern allows the customer to know the representative cares.
- **Fuss over each customer.** Make him or her feel important, even if it means allowing him to believe he is the most important customer to your business.

Words customers love (and dread) to hear

The following are words customers hear more than anything else you tell them. “Representatives want customers to hear the whole story; however, the customers only hear what they want,” Pollard said. “Make sure to hit the words they want and to avoid the words that make customers clinch.”

Rewarding words:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| + Money-saving | + Safe |
| + Time-saving | + Benefit |
| + Easy | + Powerful |
| + Fast | + Guarantee |

Annoying words:

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| – Obvious | – Procedures |
| – Wrong | – Regulations |
| – Impossible | – Laws |
| – Failure | – Misguided |
| – Policy | – Worthless |

Terrific telecommunication

Telecommunication is a hard task to handle. Sometimes customers are already in a huff when they call. Pollard said, “In order to make the call easy and painless, make customers glad they called.” He explained the telecommunicator must be patient and totally personal to get to the truth behind the call. Here are a few tips to make telephone conversations with customers or potential customers much easier:

Tackling the telephone

- **Be prepared.** Take a breath before answering the phone. Treat each call as a new day.
- **Answer the phone within two or three rings.** A prompt answer tells the customer you are willing to talk to him.
- **Say your name and use the customer’s name.** It also is suggested to write the customer’s name on a piece of paper for reference.
- **Indicate action/follow-up.** Once the customer’s reason for calling has been stated, tell him what can be done to take care of his problem or answer his question.
- **Be courteous.** Politeness will help a customer with an angry attitude become friendlier and easier to handle.
- **Smile.** Connie Couch, Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC business information specialist, suggested placing a mirror next to the phone. If the telecommunicator is smiling or has a pleasant look on his face his voice will sound pleasant.

Happy holding

Placing a hostile customer on hold is not a good idea. Pollard suggested the businessperson should handle each call completely, or as much of the call as he possibly can. He said customers with previous bad experiences probably call with an attitude that reflects the past bad experience. It is the job of the call handler to ensure the customer has a more pleasant experience.

What pleases customers most?

- No hassle
- Someone who listens
- Verbal feedback
- Immediate action
- Use of his or her name

These are a few examples of things the AHA staff will work on when dealing with customers. The AHA staff left the training session with renewed enthusiasm and drive to provide accelerated levels of customer service. Think about how you can implement these tips into your own dealings. Remember, as AHA staff does, that repeat customers are worth the special treatment. One dissatisfied customer will be far more vocal than numerous satisfied customers.

Customer service follows the golden rule — treat others the way you would want to be treated. **HW**