

Do Your Customers Still Value You?

It is time to do a value check with your customers.

We live and work in a very crowded industry called agriculture. Super competitive, right? You work regularly, negotiating with your customers; you also often compete for land, negotiate with absentee owners, and even build relationships with your neighbors to ensure they respond well when you change practices or there is a problem to remedy. All of these people are your customers.

Since you already know the above, let me be a tad blunt. Do your customers value you? Before you answer back with a (slightly offended), “Yes,” consider the following:

What people value constantly changes

For example, if we say that customers value our service and the ease of doing business with us, that is great. And they probably do — or at least they did — before they got used to what you offer being the norm.

When we have a consistent, good experience with a product or service, or even a relationship, we begin to see these positive experiences as the minimum expectation. To steer away from those expectations is a disappointment, and one we likely will not tolerate for long. Further, when we consistently receive what we originally thought of as excellent or highly valuable becomes customary, it can actually get a bit boring.

Don't get me wrong, consistency in brands and in dealing with people is essential to your value with customers because they require that their minimum expectations be met. However, your customers are constantly bombarded by other options; they are always being offered new things. Your customer is not consistent. They are constantly changing, evolving and updating their preferences based on their surroundings, their competition and much more. The competition

is not consistent either. The global environment is not consistent, and landowners are likely changing very soon if they have not already. External factors and every individual's own set of changing needs and preferences make value a constantly shifting proposition.

If you are not regularly checking in on value, something sneaky happens. It is called accidental complacency. As I said, when you consistently deliver good value, your customer gets accustomed to it, and they may even become lazy.

After all, you do a lot for them. Laziness can lead to an openness to whatever is new. Next thing you know, another beef producer has rolled into your customer's drive with a shiny new pedigree, program or price tag that piques their interest. Suddenly — BAM! — your very reliable customer starts to say things like:

“Well, your price is too high.”

“Actually, they just won the...,” fill in the blank.

“They are offering me x, y, z to go with them.”

If you are not constantly monitoring for accidental complacency, you will be shocked when that customer who may be your friend, relative or neighbor, is suddenly shopping around and you never saw it coming. Why? Because they never complained. Again, to be blunt — did you ask them what they valued?

Like it or not, consistently delivering excellent value is foundational but not transformative. So, we must always seek to be emerging and changing with our customers and constantly checking in to make sure what we offer is still at the top of their ever-changing value list. It is not magic, and it is not that difficult. Simply talk to your customers and do the value check-in before sale season this year. **HW**

Sarah Beth Aubrey is an entrepreneur and founder of Aubrey Coaching and Training (ACT). She can be reached at sarah@sarahbethaubrey.com.