

Navigating a Crisis

Lesson 9-4: Protection of Assets – Customers

Discussion Guide

“Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord.” Colossians 3:22b (NLT)

In a crisis, steward and serve your current customers. The acquisition cost of one customer alone can represent an investment of thousands of dollars, so it’s critical to evaluate customer retention in a crisis. Two questions for companies to consider:

- What is the quality of our customers?
- What is the quality of relationships with our customers?

Evaluate the quality of your customers and your relationship with them— Criteria for assessing your customer’s quality should be established based on your industry and business model. As each customer is evaluated, have the courage to fire some customers that are just too difficult and unprofitable to work with. Some examples of evaluations are below:

1. *Relationship-based evaluations*, such as how easy are they to work with? Is there aptitude for deepening the relationship? Is there argumentation or threat of litigation?
2. *Value-based evaluations*, such as profit potential, payment history, amount of referral potential, etc.

Successful companies view customers not as sales transactions, but as people with unique needs that the company strives to meet. Companies with a strong relationship to their customers see crisis as an opportunity to strengthen this relationship. Building a meaningful relationship with customers allows the potential for dialogue and engagement in a mutually beneficial manner, which is particularly valuable in a crisis. Steve Yostrow describes this as “we” relationships instead of “us and them” relationships in his book, *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*.

Creating “we” relationships starts with hiring people that want “we” relationships. Cultivating this relationship takes time and dialogue, and when done with excellence, a long-term customer is created that will stay with you during a crisis. In fact, if there is a mutual relationship, there is a good chance you can listen well enough to help your client out in the midst of chaos.

When we consider customers as people, we understand they are going through the same anxiety as everyone else. Are they going to get COVID-19? Are they going to get a salary reduction, laid-off or furloughed? Is it safe to go into work or get in an elevator? As you have dialog with customers remember that they likely need empathy and understanding.

Discussion

- When you think of your customers do you think, “we” or “us and them?” What would your customers say?
- What companies have you seen creating strong customer loyalty? Why?
- Do you feel more valued at McDonalds or at Chick-fil-A? Why?
- What lessons from your personal relationships can you apply to your professional relationships?
- Do you think of your customers as an “it” or as a “person?” Please explain.
- What would it take for you to engage with your customers in a deep and meaningful manner?
- What are your thoughts about firing a customer?

Bottom Line: Protecting your customers starts with viewing them as relationships and not just transactions. This mentality will impact all aspects of your relationships and operations. They will know (and feel) if they are viewed as just a sales number or if you deeply care about them and their issues. To keep your customers in a crisis, sincerely serve them within and outside of one.

Dig Deeper

Want to learn more?

- *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship* by Steve Yastrow
- *Raving Fans!* by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles
- *Video: Ted Talks | Was Seduced by Exceptional Customer Service* by John Boccuzzi, Jr.
- *Video: Raving Fans!* discussion by Ken Blanchard

The reason a company is in business is to provide exceptional service or products to customers. As discussed in Lesson 9-2, a balance sheet is strengthened over several years. Likewise, it takes time to create strong relationships through exceptional service. When an organization is in the midst of a crisis, it is normally too late to attempt to build your customer assets. It must be done over time, likely a few years.

Examples to consider:

- You have a critical heart issue. One doctor comes in and fully briefs you on the issue and his/her recommendation for surgery and the risks. You decide you want a second opinion. The next doctor provides the same recommendation as the first doctor, but he/she took a deep interest in you as a person and analyzed how the surgery might affect your health goals going forward. Which doctor would you likely pick?
- Molly and George love to regularly go out to dinner with friends. They like to try new places but there is one place they keep going back to. The food is excellent, but what keeps this restaurant so high on their list is the engagement of the host and wait staff. They seem to really engage with them rather than just handout a menu, take their orders, deliver the food and hand them a bill. It seems like the staff really enjoys waiting on them even though they have different staff most visits. Do you know such a restaurant?

Below is an example customer score card to use or modify as appropriate for your company/industry.

Customer Score Card – Place a check mark for your assessment of Customer with 1 being low and 4 being high

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Score
Aptitude to grow relationship					
Ease to work with					
Non-litigious					
Offers referrals					
Profit potential					
Potential annual sales					
Payment history					
Other					
Total Score					

- Score 20-28: High Quality Client – Focus on these clients
- Score 16-20: Average Client – Give great service, but unless there is potential to grow the business, do not focus significant effort on these clients
- Score <16: Poor Clients – Develop a plan to move these to Average Clients, or consider terminating
- Consider not working for litigious clients