

Three Fatal Mistakes

What not to do in sales.



by Colleen Francis

KNOWING WHAT NOT to do with your prospects and clients is just as important as knowing what to do, as these experiences illustrate.

1. The case of the anonymous acquaintance. Once, I received a magazine article in the mail that detailed the benefits of taking a public speaking course. On second look, I saw that the article was an advertorial, complete with a registration form for the course. Attached to the piece was a handwritten post-it note which read: "Colleen, I thought you would find this interesting." It was signed with an illegible initial. I had no idea who had sent me this "highly informative article." I'd never heard of the company offering the seminar. Clearly, they were hiding behind their anonymity because they did not know me and, in doing so, made the worst first impression that any sales professional can make. This lie is used in the hope that I'll feel guilty enough about not remembering who they are that I will call the company to find out, at which point they can try to sell me on their seminar.

If you're ever tempted to try to lure new customers with a lie, first ask yourself: If the customer or prospect finds out what I'm up to, will they be mad, or will I be embarrassed? If yes, then find yourself a different tactic—fast!

Staying in touch with your customers and prospects by sending them an article is a good idea. But make sure the article is relevant, identify who you are on the envelope, and make a follow-up call after they receive it.

2. The case of the schoolyard bully. While on vacation, I received a frantic call from my office. My assistant was panicked because she got a call from a man who insisted that he had a meeting set up with me for that day, and that it was "critical" that he talk to me. He also told her that he had talked to me directly, that this was a follow-up meeting, that I had promised to talk to him—and that he had "time-sensitive information." When she explained the

situation, I realized it was all a ruse. This rep had never spoken to me.

When you use a tactic that makes someone else feel bad to get what you want, you're crossing the line. Ask yourself: if your prospect found out what you were doing, would they want to have a relationship with you?

3. The case of the "close, personal friend." Once a salesperson called our office claiming to be a "close, personal friend" of mine. My assistant asked if I knew her, and while I didn't think so, I decided to take the call anyway. A couple of minutes into her pitch, I interrupted the rep and asked, "Excuse me, do I know you?" She answered: "Not now, but if we do business together, I guarantee we will become good friends."

Needless to say, we didn't do business together. Did the rep not think that I'd realize she wasn't the "close, personal friend" she was claiming to be?

Any sales tactic that makes the

prospect feel like you must think he or she is an idiot simply can't end well.

Before you try any such technique, please ask: If the prospect finds out what I'm doing, will they want to be my friend? Or will I risk earning a bad reputation and a lost opportunity? Every time you call a decision maker, have a compelling reason to speak to them, and make sure your opening line or leading question is tuned to their needs and offers them value. Try using a real reference. Tell them a story about a similar customer you have helped. Offer information that shows you know something about their business.

When it comes to being honest and lying, the line between what's appropriate and what's not, isn't so much a "fine line" as it is a gaping chasm. **SSE**

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Action: Choose integrity first.

CUSTOMER SERVICE/LOYALTY

Service Recovery

Retain your customers for life.



by John Tschohl

SERVICE RECOVERY IS putting a smile on a customer's face after you've made a mistake. It's solving a customer's problem or complaint and sending him out the door feeling great. It is bringing a customer back from the brink of defection.

Service recovery should follow every mistake. You must apologize, take responsibility for the error or inconvenience, and give the customer something of value as compensation, something that says, "We value you as a customer and want you to do business with us." What product or service can you give that will cost you little or nothing but has value in the eyes of your customers? A hotel can upgrade a disgruntled guest to a suite. A restaurant can give offer a free appetizer. A cell phone company can offer 500 free minutes.

Nothing is as powerful as a personal recommendation from a satisfied

customer, and service recovery will create word-of-mouth advertising that is 10 times more powerful than any other advertising and is 20 times cheaper.

What separates service leaders is how they respond to mistakes. Service recovery leaders master elements that drive superior customer service. Everyone walks the talk and reinforces the importance of customer service. They make sure their policies, procedures, and systems are customer-friendly, ranging from the hours the company is open to the rules governing customer payments. They hire good people, treat them well, and train and coach them in the art of customer service. They give their employees the authority to bend and

break the rules and to use their sense to take care of the customer.

Employees must have the authority to do whatever it takes, on the spot, to take care of a customer to that customer's satisfaction—not to the satisfaction of the company. Eliminate policies and procedures that prevent employees from effectively serving the customer. Then create specific procedures around service recovery that enable employees to handle customer complaints effectively. By doing so you will create a loyal customer base and a healthy bottom line. **SSE**

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Action: Fix your mistakes.

