



ARBORIST SHOP TALK

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Five Sure Ways Of Losing Tree Customers

TRYING TO CON THEM

Give, the big bluff, whatever you want to call it, it's still the same. Deceit. People hate to be lied to—and don't underestimate the average homeowner's intelligence. Even though they might not understand what you're talking about, they often have an uncanny knack for knowing whether or not you know.

Many times the three wisest words in the world are, "I don't know" (after which you can always add . . . "but I'll find out for you.")

Nobody expects you to know everything about trees they only want the solution to their own particular problem. They'll be more impressed by you if you find the right solution than if you rattle off a bunch of meaningless double-talk.

Your customer's confidence in your honesty is valuable to you. Don't blow it!

UNDEPENDABILITY

If you tell someone you'll do a certain job at about a certain time . . . you are obligated to them to do that or

let them know in adequate time if there is a change.

Too many tree men are too independent for their own good. Maybe they think that they are their own boss and not obligated to anyone.

That's wrong. Every customer is your boss . . . until the job is done and you are paid.

And if they are not satisfied . . . you or your company will probably never do another job again for them.

Even if you start a job promptly and just take off a few limbs to "tie up the job" then let it go for days without any communication with the customer, you'll only do it once to them. You'll lose that customer forever.

So be dependable. It means a lot to people.

And if you do get detained or held up for some reason, be considerate enough to keep your customer informed. That may be enough to keep the customer!

CHISELING

One of the most unfair and infantile tactics in any

business is chiseling the customer with "add-on" extra costs, just because the contractor bid the job too low.

That's not the customer's fault. You're the tree expert, remember?

O.K., you took the job too cheap. That's business. Accept it gracefully, coolly, and you'll probably come out O.K.

One fair way to make ends meet is to sell a little more work while you're there. A couple of \$10 or \$25 extra small jobs can often make the difference between a gain or loss on an underbid biggie.

If you can't do that, at least a too-cheap job could be good advertising for you over a longer range than just that day or so.

And at any cost, don't antagonize an otherwise satisfied customer by trying to chisel him for your mistake. It's not worth it.

RUDENESS

While some less-than-expert tree surgeons slide by year after year on their charm, even the most skilled arborists will have trouble keeping customers if they act offensively.

A few important things to remember is that everybody around the home or other location where you're working is worth being polite to. Even animals. (I once lost a very good customer because her dog didn't like me!)

Be patient with kids. Talk to them. If you try to chase them off rudely they will never get out of your hair.

Try to explain why it's so dangerous to be close to your work site, yet treat them like adults and they'll often be just as understanding.

Tact is always better than force. If you send somebody's kid in crying because you yelled at them, you can believe the next tree job at that house will most likely not be done by you.

INCONSISTENT PRICING

Another good way to lose even your best customers when you least expect it is by playing games with your prices.

For example, say you are pruning two or three small trees for a good paying customer for about \$15 each and the next door neighbor asks you to do a couple of theirs. You are already there and have your equipment on the job, so you quote the neighbor a price of \$10 on his tree of the same size.

Here's how you will lose two customers! Customer #2 will boast what a great deal he got to customer #1 and customer #1 will feel cheated because he paid more.

And of course customer #2 will dislike you for having socked it to his buddy.

Consistent pricing is a business essential. That's why fine restaurants will throw their best lobster in the garbage before they would sell it for half price. You'll do a lot better to lose a few jobs here and there than to lose customers because they don't trust your prices.

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