

CUSTOMER SERVICE TIPS

Brightening the day for your customer service reps

by Ed Wandtke

■ An inside customer service representative's time is spent handling customer complaints, solving problems, and performing some telephone sales or taking orders each day. This job is often one of many frustrations and very few thank-yous.

The challenge as an owner or manager is motivating these individuals and helping them maintain a positive attitude while dealing with customers.

These individuals are extremely important since they are your front line in customer communications. Having them come to work upbeat, excited about dealing with customers, and coming across concerned

about customer needs on the phone is very necessary.

If your company service reps do not have a very positive attitude, I am sure your company maintains a below-average level of customer satisfaction.

Money has proven to be very ineffective in motivating most customer service representatives.

The most effective methods of reinforcing customer service qualities and the values you want your representative to reflect when communicating with the customers is to repeat these qualities and values to the employees often. In addition, you should try some of the following techniques:

1) Send customer service personnel to training seminars

in your local community. For example, "positive thinking" seminars have typically enhanced their day-to-day performance on the job.

2) Hold regular meetings with customer service personnel to keep them informed about what is going on in the company. Particularly pay attention to how the company's performance could be affecting this person.

For example, if there have been a lot of "reworks" as a result of customer complaints, this could cause your service rep more stress than is typical for the job. Be aware and lend a hand if necessary.

3) Ask customer service personnel how the company can improve, and reward them for their ideas—even if all of them are not practical. Remember: the more ideas you get, the better the chances you find one that is exceptional. A

good reward could be taking that person to lunch away from the office.

4) Provide an upbeat, enjoyable setting for your customer service personnel to work in. A good way to keep people upbeat is to purchase a calendar with a joke a day. At least this way, each day there will be something different and humorous about the job.

Can't you always tell when you are talking to a person with a smile?

A conscious effort each day to sincerely check up on how your office personnel are doing can prove invaluable in the long run.

—Ed Wandtke owns Wandtke & Associates, a green industry consulting firm. His services are available by writing 2586 Oakstone Dr., Columbus, OH 43231, or by phoning (614) 891-3111.

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS

OCTOBER

8-10: American Society of Consulting Arborists annual meeting, Biltmore Estate, Asheville, N.C. Telephone: (303) 466-2722.

9: Target Specialty Products' annual fall seminar and exhibit, Red Lion Hotel, Ontario, Calif. Telephone: (800) 352-3870.

12-14: Production of Field Grown Nursery Stock, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va. Telephone: (703) 231-5445.

19-20: Pacific Horticultural Trade Show, Los Angeles (Calif.) Convention Center. Telephone: (916) 567-0200.

21-23: Golf Summit, Marriott Orlando (Fla.) World Center. Telephone: (407) 744-6006.

21-24: Atlantic Seedsmen's Association Convention, Charleston, S.C. Telephone: (814) 237-0330.

22-23: Xeriscape '92, San Diego (Calif.) Convention Center. Telephone: (619) 443-1756.

22-24: International Society of Arboriculture Rocky Mountain Chapter annual meeting, Town House Inn, Great Falls, Mont. Telephone: (406) 721-7275.

23-25: New Jersey Tree Expo, Sheraton Poste Inn, Cherry Hill. Telephone: (908) 246-3210.

26-27: Fertilizer Outlook '93: Ana Hotel, Washington, D.C. Telephone: (202) 675-8250.

29-31: Texas Association of Landscape Contractors

annual conference and exposition, Infomart/Loews Anatole Hotel, Dallas. Telephone: (214) 241-1399.

NOVEMBER

1: Southwest Outdoor Power Equipment Show, Arlington (Tex.) Convention Center. Telephone: (512) 443-7999.

1-4: International Irrigation Exposition, New Orleans, La. Telephone: (703) 524-1200.

1-4: Southern Agricultural Chemicals Association annual convention, Hilton Head Island (S.C.) Hyatt Regency Hotel. Telephone: (912) 995-2125.

1-5: New Tree Biology Seminars, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. Telephone: (704) 262-3045.

3: Florida Chapter, Sports

Turf Managers Association meeting, Pompano Stadium. Telephone: (305) 938-7477 or (305) 938-0217.

7-9: American Society of Landscape Architects annual meeting, Washington (D.C.) Grand Hyatt Hotel. Telephone: (202) 686-2752.

8-10: Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association annual meeting, King & Prince Hotel, St. Simons Island. Telephone: (404) 769-4076.

8-11: National Institute on Park and Grounds Management annual educational conference, Richmond, Va. Telephone: (414) 733-2301.

11-15: New Tree Biology Seminars, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. Telephone: (704) 262-3045.