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Get off to a good start

BY BRUCE WILSON

I have always believed making a good first impression is the key to starting a long-term relationship on the right foot. And, without question, it leads to a more profitable relationship with your customers. When a customer gives you a contract for the first time, they have certain expectations that you have helped create, or they may have created based on your reputation in the market.

These expectations are usually high, so obviously, they watch you more closely at the start. Sometimes, the slightest, seemingly littlest glitch starts to erode their trust in your organization. They may not say anything at first, but the doubt starts to creep into their thinking.

Beginning the process

The worst part about this is they then start counting hours, looking with a finer eye at every little detail, which makes it harder for you to satisfy them. So,

here are some suggestions for assuring that you get your customer relationship off to a great start:

1. Take control of setting customer expectations. Communicate what they should expect to see during the first 30 days, preferably in writing, and then stick to it.
2. If possible, sell an extra clean-up to bring the property up to the level that is in the specifications for ongoing maintenance. If you can't, I suggest that you clean it up in the first 30 days anyway. Though the customer at first might agree to the longer timetable to avoid paying for the clean up, they soon forget they agreed to the extended time frame and begin to get dissatisfied. It then becomes your fault.
3. As a manager or sales person, be on the job the first few visits to make sure that job is being done the way that meets your expectations. Make sure the customer knows you are there and that you care.
4. It is a good idea to take pictures before you start to establish the baseline. Haven't we all heard "that this place does not look as good as it used to" even when we know we have greatly improved the property? Pictures can refresh everyone's memories.

It is spring and many of you start many new jobs, as well as, most of your old ones, at the same time. You must place additional emphasis on planning and communication during this very stressful period. If you can get off to a good start, you will be surprised how much easier and more profitable the rest of the season can be.

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