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How to Be Appropriately Pushy

By Suzanne Falter-Barns

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One of the things that's often hard to know is how and when to be pushy appropriately. In these hardscrabble times, perfectly polite people don't stand much of a chance of getting what they want. However, not enough can be said for making yourself known in a decent and unobnoxious manner. The key is to use your intuition and your brain, both at the same time, and pray for a little luck.

When Lazaro Hernandez was a fashion student at Parson's School of Design in New York, he had a chance encounter in an airport with Anna Wintour, editor in chief of Vogue Magazine. In fact, she was getting on his airplane. Lazaro wasn't so sure he had the nerve to approach, but one hour into the flight, he could stand it no longer.

Lazaro wrote a humble note on an airsick bag, which explained that he was a fashion student who would soon be looking for an internship. He noted that she probably got requests like this all the time, but wondered if perhaps someone had given her a chance at the beginning of her career. He also wrote that he knew she had the power to help him. Then, trembling, he approached.

Lazaro stood before Ms. Wintour's seated figure, and said her name. No answer. He repeated her name several times. No answer. He even crossed the uncrossable boundary and touched her arm. Still no reply. Finally, he left his plea under her martini glass and crept back to his seat. Several months later, he received a call from a major designer who'd gotten Lazaro's letter from Ms. Wintour with instructions that it was not to be ignored. A subsequent interview proved that he had talent, and Lazaro was hired for his first internship.

Lazaro not only had great luck to get on an airplane with the most powerful woman in the fashion industry, he had the savvy to make use of the opportunity. He was ready when his break came with a portfolio of samples he'd worked hard on, making it the best it could be. Then he did the most important thing of all: he sent Ms. Wintour a thank you note, which prompted a fax from the woman herself saying she was glad it all worked out.

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This to me is a fine example of well-handled pushiness, in that Lazaro used the opportunity as much as he could, but then was completely respectful and gracious. It is also evidence that a letter works, especially when delivered under unique circumstances. Designer Michael Kors was a store clerk, he sold Calvin Klein a ski jacket, and stuffed his design sketches into the sleeve as the jacket was en route to delivery. A documentary film director I know who needed a quote from a famous director to help her get grants pulled a similar coup. She found out where Woody Allen lived, then had a copy of her latest film delivered to his door with a handwritten note requesting a favorable comment. He obliged.

Everyone has to start somewhere, even the rich and famous. So if you can approach politely, preferably through some other means than the front office, your efforts will probably not be seen as pushy but as what one does to get a break.

Part of the reason this works is the honesty involved. You are telling them what you need up front. So this is very different than talking up a potential contact at a cocktail party with the sole agenda of having them look at your work, or hanging out a health club frequented by a certain star so you can add them to your list of influential friends. Those would be considered inappropriate `covert agenda' moves that are really looked down upon by the rich and powerful.

Too often we assume that the way to approach an industry or a leader is from the bottom, worming your way up through the ranks. A much more effective approach is just to go straight to the top, where you very well may connect with the person who can make everything happen for you. This is why letters are such a good tool for approaching these people. They can read it in their own time, they're not too obtrusive, and if well-written and delivered in a subtle but attention-getting way, they can work wonders.

Important people, just like the rest of us, do not like to be used. On the other hand, most people do like to be helpful, and a direct request can be amazingly effective.

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Customer Service – A Lost Art?

By Craig Binkley

Is customer service a lost art? Before you answer that question, take a moment and think about the last few times you have gone shopping or out to dinner. Okay, now that you have really thought about it, is your answer any different?

Why is it that when we actually DO receive excellent customer service that it makes such an impression on us that we usually choose to go back? Why – because the occurrences are so few and far between!!!

As a home business owner, it is imperative to my business that customer service is ALWAYS a top priority. Remember the saying: "If you don't take care of your customer, somebody else will". I'm sure you have read or heard it somewhere before.....and how true it is.

Here are a few ways to improve customer service at your business:

- 1) SMILE – Sounds too simple, right? As a customer, would you prefer to be serviced by a smiling face, or a scowl that would befit a guard dog?
- 2) LISTEN – Always be slow to speak and quick to listen. Let customers express themselves without you trying to do it for them. Nobody likes being interrupted.
- 3) DON'T BE TOO PUSHY – Yeah, I know – the bottom line is sales, right? There is a fine line between suggesting products/services and pushing them down a customer's throat. If you are too pushy, your customer will probably walk away and take their business elsewhere.
- 4) PHONE ETTIQUETTE – Whether you are answering or initiating a call, always remember who the customer is. Be polite. Try "Yes sir/ma'am" instead of "yeah" and "nope". If you don't have an answer for your customer – offer to do some research to find what they are inquiring about.
- 5) THANK YOU – ALWAYS thank your customers. Even if you could not help them or they decided not to purchase from you. Leave them with a positive impression of your business before they leave.
- 6) TRAINING – Train your employees. Don't let an untrained employee ruin your track record of

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excellent customer service. Train your employees on–the–job for as long as necessary to teach them good customer service.

"And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise"

Luke 6:31

In conclusion: Customer service may be THE most important aspect of your business plan. I know of many people who are willing to pay a little more for a product or service in order receive excellent customer care. Price, advertising, and location are all vital to a business----- but whatever you do, don't

overlook the all–important "Good Customer Service".

Craig Binkley - husband, father and home business owner assisting in the restoration of the "traditional" family through home business ownership.

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