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What's Love Got To Do With It?

By JoAnna Brandi

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Customer Loyalty, we all want it. Don't we?

Some people say it's dead – they say that customers are fickle, that they don't want loyalty, that they just want the lowest price and the fastest way to get it. Some say that customers have changed and that the pursuit of loyalty is foolish, since it's the customers that are not interested in it. I don't agree. Loyalty is not DEAD, it's just sleeping.

I agree that customers have changed (because our needs have changed). We're more demanding than ever before, we have more choices than ever before, we're more educated than most of the companies we do business with (about their products and their competitive position). And here's the truth: we don't give our loyalty to companies that don't give their loyalty to us.

Companies have in the last ten years made it more difficult, more confusing, and more frustrating to deal with them than ever before. They give all the "special offers" to the new customers; they've removed human beings from answering phones and answering questions. They make us pump our own gas, check on our packages, book our own airline tickets and figure out when they've made mistakes on our accounts. They cut their training budgets and have trimmed their service staffs to the bone. They pay big bonuses at the top, but at the bottom of the corporate pyramid, where the customers lie (if they make the pyramid at all) they charge us fees for the privilege of using their services!

Is it no wonder we've become rather selective to whom we pledge our loyalty?

No, customer loyalty is not dead, but it is ailing. It is given only to those companies that earn it and keep earning it by delivering value and positive experiences on a consistent basis.

What's Love Got To Do With It?

Companies that want to Thrive...not just survive in this century better figure out fast that keeping more of their customers, and keeping them happy is a critical economic necessity.

Good and loyal customers are critical to profitability. Estimates are that it costs 6 – 30 times more to get new customers than it does to maintain the ones you have. If you keep losing customers and have to keep replacing them, it makes sense that you are spending money on sales and marketing that could be going elsewhere.

It's your LOYAL customers that give you referrals and sing your praises in your advertising and testimonials. Referral business is like "free" new customers. So the money you would have paid to GET the new customer drops back down to your bottom line.

I find it is sadly true that most companies don't have a strategic plan for keeping customers, keeping them happy OR keeping them coming back time and time again with their money and their friends. Even though Customer Loyalty was determined to be a #1 concern of CEO's (according to the

Conference Board) how many companies do more than pay lip service to the importance of customer service and loyalty in their organization? Your guess is as good as mine. Based on the service I receive as a customer, well, I can understand why more customers aren't loyal, can you?

What can YOU do to change that? What can you do to turn the tide on this disturbing trend and develop long lasting, loyal customer relationships?

And what's LOVE got to do with it?

Everything. Business is based on relationships and relationships are based on qualities such as trust, respect, appreciation, understanding, generosity, clear open and honest communication and heavy doses of kindness, compassion and affection. Sometimes known as LOVE.

Studies show that the main reason customers will leave a company they are doing business with is that they perceive the company does not care about them or their needs. And conversely, studies show that when asked why they stay loyal to a particular company for a long time, customers respond, "Because they cared about me." This perception and feeling of caring is the emotional bridge between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. And, it's often the bridge between lackluster profits and thriving good health on the bottom line.

It's about emotion. Loyalty is an emotional attachment to a company based on the customer's subjective perception that the company is delivering the value they desire or need, when and how they need it. It's based on their needs, and it's based on their experience of doing business with us. As a customer myself, I know that the companies I chose to give my loyalty to are those that make me feel good about the whole experience of doing business with them.

When we FEEL good about doing business with a company we form emotional ties, not just financial ties with them. Let's face it, customers are emotionally attached to their money – if we want them to give some of it to us – we need to get them emotionally attached to US.

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Emotions have been "undiscussable" in business for a long time. "Feelings" is the "F" word of the business world. How many times have we heard that we are to keep our feelings out of it, keep our emotions away from our business decisions, and park our personal problems at the door? Sound familiar? Well, I've learned that you cannot expect your staff to bring their passion to work but not their feelings. It just doesn't work that way. It's time we developed an emotional literacy in business.

Employees and Customers are people. People have feelings. And as people, their decisions are effected by their feelings, whether they can identify the feelings or not. Any salesperson can tell you that while people make decisions that look logical, they are more often than not, based on emotion.

As people we are perceptive, conscious, sensitive, alive and feeling beings! It's an essential part of our nature. When we recognize that in business, we'll work harder at building the emotional equity with a customer that determines whether or not they become a loyal customer or a lost customer.

It is the perception, the feeling of being cared about that keeps the customers coming back. And it's what we do to build and support and create that feeling that creates a positive experience for the customer.

Every customer has two sets of needs. The business needs are logical, rational, and practical. The

personal needs are emotional, illogical and sometimes even irrational, but carry a lot of weight. The fulfillment of the customer's business needs is usually what gets them in the door in the first place—you are selling what they need. But it's the fulfillment of the customer's personal needs that will keep them coming back. Once the business needs are met, they often take a back seat to the customer's experiential needs.

It's the quality of the emotional experience you have with a company that will determine whether or not you want to keep recreating that experience. We come back to companies that have what we want and create a positive experience for us. We leave companies that don't have what we want or create a negative experience for us. Experience is emotional.

When a customer walks away from the whole experience (your greeting, interacting with your Web site, the dealing with people in your office...) of doing business with you with positive emotions like happiness, joy, delight, caring, security, welcome and appreciation—they will most likely want to come back (if you recreate the positive emotions consistently).

If they walk away from the experience with negative emotions like frustration, anger, disgust, fear, incompetence, indifference, if they leave with a lack of confidence, if they leave feeling stupid—and if that's what's delivered consistently—they usually don't stay around unless they haven't YET found some other place to go.

It's the quality of the emotional experiences that customers have with you that will determine whether or not they will continue to do business with you over time.

What's LOVE got to do with it? Maybe more than we thought!

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Tim Sanders, Chief Solutions Officer, Yahoo writing in "Love is the Killer App," says "What do I mean by "love?" The best general definition that I've read comes from philosopher Milton Mayeroff's brilliant book, *On Caring*. Love, he writes, 'is the selfless promotion of the growth of the other.' When you help others grow to become the best people that they can be, you are being loving, and as a result, you grow."

What a great description for what we want to happen in our business relationships! I want to do business with a company that believes in the selfless promotion of the growth of ME and my business! I want to give my money to companies that want to help me be the best ME I can be—whether I'm buying cosmetics or computers or telephone service or food. I want to do business with someone who has my best interests in mind.

In lieu of that – I'll do my own research, haul my own lumber and pump my own gas – but if I'm doing the service work—then I want the lowest price possible! I'm not loyal to companies that don't care enough about me to make my experience with them easy, stress and hassle free, and pleasant. How about you?

What's love got to do with it? A whole lot more than we ever thought. Let's start doing a better job of creating experiences that the customer perceives as positive, caring, and yes, maybe even loving.

JoAnna Brandi is Publisher of JoAnna Brandi's Customer Care Coach TM, a weekly training program designed to teach managers "The Art and Science of Exquisite Customer Care." You can sign up to get her latest tips and get your personalized weekly coaching program at

. You can reach her via email:

Love is Good!

By Frances Evelyn Mison

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Love is Good!
But is it Blind?
Will Love visit Us?
Or will it Blow away?
I'm so fed up of looking!
For Love!
Do you feel that way?
Shall we say for Today
Though!
That Love is Good!
The Sadness has Passed at Last!
With this New Love

What's Love Got To Do With It?

that we have.
So Shall we say
Just for Today.
That Love is Good!

I am a new author and poet. I would love to make writing my career, and actually receive some money, for doing what I love to do—"Write"

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