

Small Business Success

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Community
Futures Newsask



New Year Resolutions

Many of us make resolutions to start off the New Year, whether it's to lose weight, exercise more, quit smoking, or whatever, but do you ever think to make resolutions for your business? Personally I think it's the perfect time of year to take stock of what went well in our business and what didn't and adjust our business strategies accordingly.

Published in cooperation with [Blue Beetle Books](#)

As we start 2014, I am making a few specific resolutions: first I am going to stop being a charity to people (read clients) who don't need my help. That's not to say that I am not going to work hard for them, because I always do, but I'm not going to give them a whole bunch of my time for free. I have a habit of doing that and a friend recently told me that it could make me look like a pushover. She said I should charge a fair price for a fair days work. She made the point that on a couple of projects in 2013 I probably ended up working for less than minimum wage. She's right of course; I have an overwhelming desire to always exceed expectations, which is good but not sustainable if taken to extremes. This year I resolve not to work more hours than I am paid for - or at least not many (there I go weakening already!). My



second resolution is to spend more time actually selling - so often I find myself working 'in' my business rather than 'on' my business. It's easy to spend more time pushing paper than selling, which is after all what brings in the money.

So, this issue is all about things we can start doing in the New Year that will make our business better. First, here are five resolutions to get you started. Then check out 15 ways you can improve your customer service and get more of your customers coming back for more!

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My goals this year will be more realistic (resolutions are also goals) - first decide what you want to achieve. Goals should be reachable, but should also stretch you a little. What is it you want to accomplish with your business this year? Make a list (yes - write it down; people who write down their goals are 80 per cent more likely to achieve them).

I am going to commit to my goals - the second step is to commit to the achievement of your goals. Making a commitment is more than just thinking about doing something. It means deciding exactly how you are going to adjust things in order to be successful. It means asking tough questions about the things you're committing to. Why is that particular thing important to you? What resources do you need in order to reach your goals? What help will you need? These answers are stepping-stones to reaching your objectives and goals.

I'm going to get help, or delegate - none of us are capable of doing everything ourselves as much as we might like to think we can - especially in business. In order to achieve the goals you have to figure out what skills you need to bring in and identify whose support will you need.

I'm going to make better decisions - easier said than done I know, but it's the little choices you make every day that move you toward success, or away from it. How you spend money and what you spend it on. How you treat people who work for you or who buy from you. How ethically you run your business. How environmentally sustainable you are. Each choice either supports your goal, or drags you further from it. Be aware of the decisions you make every day and stay on track.

I'm not going to be afraid of change - there's not too much you can be sure of at the start of any new year, except that there will be change. If you are the kind of person who is resistant to change, you'll continue to struggle. If you want to grow and have your business grow, you must learn how to embrace the changes that come your way, and ride them, like a wave, to discover the next new stage. Business is ever changing, and you are moving forward or backwards, there is no status quo. Challenge yourself to be open to change and to embrace it when it arrives naturally, or is forced upon you.

I'm an optimist, I am heading into 2014 full of hope for my business, and my clients will hopefully recognize that optimism and perhaps it will inspire them to use my services even more than in 2013. Here's wishing you a wonderful world of business during 2014!

5 Ways to Get Serious about Customer Service

Published in cooperation with [Blue Beetle Books](#)

Be honest about customer service - plan for it, don't just expect it to happen.

That frozen fake smile and the wooden low energy greeting does not, and never will, equate to good customer service. Excellent customer service has to come from the heart; those delivering it have to believe in it and mean it - they have to care. It all starts with hiring the right people, building a team that cares and developing a corporate philosophy that embodies a genuine willingness to help people. It's no good just telling your staff that they need to be nice to customers; you need a system, or process, or training program, which teaches them how to communicate effectively. You must empower them to make customers happy. Parameters need to be set within which they can operate to fix problems and exceed expectations.

Customer service is not about half measures - you need to be 100% committed.



If you are going to provide positively outrageous customer service it has to be all the time. No half measures. Let me give you an example. In my town there is a small grocery chain that prides itself on having the friendliest and most efficient checkout and floor staff; and they do. Everyone says so. But, about two years ago I was in one of their stores and came across an exception, a check out operator who obviously didn't buy into this philosophy. Sure, she went through the motions, said hello, asked how I was, but her sour face and tone betrayed how she really felt. She didn't want to be there and certainly didn't want to be serving me. I was shocked. I never saw her again, even though I visited the store every week. Perhaps the manager recognized that she didn't fit, or he had lots of complaints, and they parted company. The thing is, I thought to myself at the time, is the beginning of a decline at this store? It put me on edge for a while, and I started to look for other evidence of slipping standards. Since then the store has continued to provide excellent customer service, but I still remember the incident and it planted a seed of doubt in my mind. It can take a lot of work to build a reputation for excellent customer service and just one bad apple to ruin it.

Customers only want to hear yes.

The customer is always right. We've all heard this old adage before, but it's so true. It's often hard to let an awkward customer be right, but at the end of the day, wherever possible, you have to somehow let them at least believe they are right. The exception of course is when the customer is blatantly wrong and what they are doing is hurting your business more than having them slag you off in public.

Make exceeding expectations the norm.

Too often businesses make promises they can't live up to. Make it your policy to under promise and over deliver. It's far better to say to a customer that something will be ready for them in two weeks and deliver it in ten days, than to say you will deliver it in ten days and make them wait two weeks. In both cases the customer got what they wanted in the same amount of time, but in the first example they enjoyed a pleasant surprise (viewed as excellent customer service) and in the second they experienced a frustrating four days (viewed as poor customer service). It sounds simple, but few businesses operate like this.

Have a customer service policy and make sure your staff understands it.

Employees who know, and fully understand, your policy and are clear about what they can or can't offer a customer with a complaint, will act in a confident and professional manner. Confidence is vital. A difficult customer is put at ease far quicker, and the situation defused more effectively, by a confident and empowered staff member. Customers with a concern want to be listened to first and foremost. They want their situation understood and they want a fair and amicable settlement (admittedly from their perspective). This will more likely be achieved and accepted by the customer if it is seen to be policy rather than an impromptu, off-the-cuff solution.

Once a fair and amicable settlement has been reached, you should set about exceeding expectations. Offer the customer something they are not expecting. It can be anything; a Starbucks gift card, or perhaps a discount off their next purchase - the value is less important than the gesture.

5 Ways to Get Serious about Customer Service

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Keep improving your customer service.

In the first five points I talked about a local grocery store that has provided excellent customer service for years; we customers have come to expect it - dare I say even take it for granted. The problem is that it has become the norm and customers no longer look at it as 'excellent' customer service. That's why you have to keep upping the ante and continuously improve how you treat your customers, if you want to impress them.

An effective customer service policy continues to improve the customer experience. How?

Proactively listen to your customers.

Listen to your customers - find out what they want. You may be surprised to find that the smallest thing can make the biggest impression. Listen to your employees, what are they hearing from customers? What would they like to be able to do for their customers? The answers are there; if you just open your mind to new possibilities.

Feedback from your customers will tell you what more you could be doing to impress them. When you get right down to it, customer service is a matter of perception - their perception! Excellent customer service means different things to different people. The only way you can be sure you are providing excellent customer service is to ask your customers.

Short exit surveys, follow up surveys, or contact by telephone are effective ways of ensuring that your customers are happy, rather than dissatisfied and complaining about you to others. I own a Ford car and after every service I receive a call asking me whether I was happy with my last visit and was there anything else they could have done for me. They ask questions such as, was I dealt with promptly, was the service courteous, was my car washed and detailed, how was my overall experience, what could they have done better?

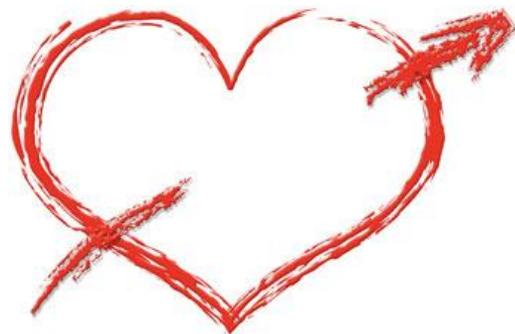
What impresses me most is that it's not just lip service; they actually follow up if something isn't quite right. If they were busy and didn't have time to wash my car before I picked it up, I am sent a gift certificate to get it done at my convenience. You can understand why I've bought several cars from this dealership over the years.

Once you've listened - do something about it!

You can be the best listener in the business, but if you don't evaluate the results of all that you learn, you'll be no further forward. It is no good training your staff, empowering them, and instilling them with a highly positive corporate customer service philosophy if you never evaluate the results. Nothing works all the time. Things go round, life goes on, new employees join the company who perhaps don't buy into the customer service principle; difficult customers put a strain on the system or take advantage of it. Instigate ways to check on your progress. The survey mentioned in the last point is a start, but also hold regular staff meetings and listen to what your employees have to say about how your customer service policy is working for them. Continually adapt the program to keep it fresh.

It's not just about front-line staff.

Make every member of staff responsible for customer service. In many organizations, only frontline staff is given responsibility for customer service. For example there is a major wholesale warehouse chain whose checkout clerks offer cheerful and efficient customer service - they are pleasant, cheerful and helpful. This same chain prides itself on its returns policy, which is quick, painless and friendly. So far so good - but if you are wandering through their massive warehouse and ask a staff member where something is, they inevitably have no idea. What's more, they give the impression they don't really care. A typical answer is, "Sorry, I don't know" and they quickly walk off.



This is particularly true of the people offering product samples, who are usually part-time. Management almost certainly doesn't see them as part of the team, and therefore not part of the customer service equation. Customers of course see no difference between someone handing them a sample and the checkout staff, or even management.

Janitorial staff also falls into this category, as most companies don't see them as interacting with customers. They are supposed to blend into the background - become invisible. Someone should try telling that to customers who constantly ask them for directions or other assistance!

The fine line between friendly and disrespectful

Your employees should always, always be polite, friendly and helpful. Respect is not out of fashion! I don't know about you but I'm not so sure I like people taking a look at my debit card or credit card and saying "thanks Mike - have a nice day!" I know they are only trying to be friendly, they're actually trying to be polite, but they are not my friends and actually I'd like a little respect - I'd like them to say sir or Mr. Wicks. I'd never dream of calling any new or potential customer of mine by their first name, until we have begun a relationship and either I have been asked by them to use their given name, or it is obvious this is now acceptable.

Even More Ways to Get Serious about Customer Service

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Overselling will come back to haunt you.

It's tempting to get as much out of a live prospect as you can. After all, they seem keen, they have money to spend, why not let them? The problem is that many people get carried away when confronted by a salesperson they like, and a product they are impressed with.

A friend of mine let his son's girlfriend practice her sales demonstration on him - it was for some good, but expensive cookware, which she had just started to sell part-time to help her pay her way through college. Well, we know how important relationships are in selling and this relationship was obviously off to a good start. My friend wanted the young woman to do well, so was very open. He did make it clear however, that he had no intention of buying more pots and pans that day and the young saleswoman knew this.



During the presentation however, my friend became super impressed with the product, especially her demonstration of how much more effective these particular pans were and how much energy they saved, and ended up ordering \$1,200 worth. This was all good, except that a little later that day, our friend realized he had got carried away and started suffering buyer's remorse. He couldn't really afford the cookware; neither did he really need that amount. They were a nice to have, not a need to have. To her credit the young woman realized that her new customer might have been put in a difficult situation and called back to check whether he still wanted to proceed with the order. Although my friend reduced the order to a single pan, he was so impressed with the young woman's integrity, not to mention the wonderful cookware, he introduced her to several friends who were keen home cooks. The result was several thousands of dollars of sales rather than one unhappy sale. It was exceptional customer service, not great salesmanship that won the day.

Customers inevitably win.

Once you start to argue with a customer you are going to lose business, not just theirs, but anyone they talk to later. The fact is, when they tell the story to their friends and neighbours later their rant will have morphed into something quite different. One where you couldn't possibly have been, even remotely, correct or fair. You will have taken on the role of an ogre, and you have no chance to defend yourself. Remember a dissatisfied customer communicates to 16 other potential customers whereas a highly satisfied customer only tells eight potential customers. So, even if you were to win the argument, you'd still lose the business.

Build a relationship with your customers

Don't forget your customers - keep in touch with them in between seeing them. Remember, it costs five to ten times more to get a new customer than it does to encourage an old one back. Too often we get a sale and then forget the customer. Keeping in touch is especially important when you sell high-priced items that don't need replacing for quite some time.

For instance, if you buy a car and keep it for four years and then decide to trade it in for a new vehicle, how likely is it that you will remember the person's name who sold it to you all those years ago? More to the point, are you likely to specifically seek them out when you buy your next car, even if it's from the same dealer? Probably not, but if over that four years, that same sales person has sent you regular postcards saying that he or she hopes you are still enjoying your vehicle, and inviting you to the occasional launch party for a new vehicle, you are far more likely to visit them when the time comes for that new car smell.

The most successful car salespeople are those that have been selling to the same people for the last twenty years or more - and of course to the rest of their family and friends too.

Surprise your customers

Going above and beyond expectations, by giving your customers something they don't expect, can not only impress your customers, but also build their loyalty toward you. Not to mention having them extoll your virtues to all they meet. I am writing this in December 2013 and Westjet have just done exactly this. They had Santa (dressed in Westjet blue, not red) ask passengers boarding two flights what they would like for Christmas. When the flights arrived at their destination the passengers received exactly what they asked Santa for (we're talking a 50" television, a diamond ring, flights to see family, and in one case new socks). The resulting YouTube video (<http://youtu.be/zIElvi2MuEk>) has been viewed 32 million times - now that's taking surprising customers to a whole new level!

Every time we exceed expectations we win a long-term customer (and often more). Look for ways to exceed expectations. You don't have to be a huge corporation like Westjet; I was buying perfume for my wife recently and the woman serving me was very helpful, spending a great deal of time ensuring that my choice would be well received. At the end of the sales transaction, she gave me two or three sample vials of perfume. Just a small thing, and something they commonly do, but even so, after the great service it was icing on the cake - she and the store exceeded my expectations, made me feel good and made me a loyal customer.

Keep your customers coming back.

Make all your customers Boomerang Customers! There's nothing like having customers that just keep coming back! They are worth their weight in gold. And it's easy; all you have to do is give them what they want and then some. The secret, lies in knowing what they want and how they want it.

Just Watch Me! Video Contest



We are pleased to support an exciting video contest this fall... "Just Watch Me." Successful entrepreneurs with disabilities are asked to share their stories for a chance to win up to \$1,000 in cash and prizes.

The contest starts December 3 (in recognition of the International Day of People with Disabilities.) Contest video submission closes January 24, 2014. Public voting will begin on February 5 and runs until February 19. The winner will be announced February 26, 2014.

Contest sponsors are Community Futures Saskatchewan and Community Futures Manitoba. For rules and all the information, go to www.justwatchmecontest.ca.

Video Conferences Available at the Newsask Office

Newsask is committed to offering citizens in the region video conference training, seminars and workshops that are made available through the Saskatchewan Video Conference Network. There are many sponsoring entities including: Canada Business Infosource, Women Entrepreneurs, Canada Revenue Agency, and the Province of Saskatchewan. An amazing variety of video conferences are available to anyone interested but they must register in advance with the Community Futures office. Learn from professional and experienced presenters in a casual classroom environment, via video conference to our boardroom here in Tisdale. There is a \$10.00 charge for each session to cover costs and any handouts. The facilities are also available to community groups for a reasonable rental fee.

Newsask is utilizing a Facebook page to list the Video Conferences available, the dates and a short description. To access the information, log onto Facebook and search for "Community Futures Newsask."

*For information or to register, contact us at least **24 hours** prior to the video conference. Email: admin@newsaskcfdc.ca, Phone: 306-873-4449, Toll Free: 1-888-586-9855 or checkout the website at www.newsaskcfdc.ca*

January 2014

15-Jan	9:00 – 12:00	Doing Business in Canada: A Guide for New Canadians	C/MBSC
16-Jan	1:00 – 3:00	Blogging for Business	C/MBSC
21-Jan	1:00 – 3:00	Am I Ready for Self Employment?	C/MBSC
23-Jan	10:30 – 12:00	Personal and Business Finance: Budgeting for Success	C/MBSC
29-Jan	1:00 – 4:00	Learn to be Profitable! Pricing & Costing	C/MBSC
30-Jan	1:00 – 3:00	Introduction to Income Statements	C/MBSC

Cartoon

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"I need a list of specific unknown problems that we'll encounter."

North East Supported Employment Program



Canada



North East Supported Employment Program

Employment Services for Employers and Persons with Disabilities

We can **assist employers to diversify their workforce** by providing information, consultation, referrals and support. **Expand your labour market pool by hiring a person with many Abilities.**

Services are available to persons and employers in the northeast region of Saskatchewan. Contact Sheila today for more information by phone at 1-877-873-4550 or e-mail to nesep@sasktel.net

We are available to business and can assist owners, managers and staff in becoming more knowledgeable and comfortable with the topic of disability as it pertains to you. Learn strategies that help you include persons with disabilities as employees and customers

Job Accommodations

Are modifications and adjustments to a job or work environment making it possible for a person experiencing barriers to perform the essential functions of the job. We can assist you by consulting on possible job accommodations, funding options and implementation. We can assist and support employers with existing employees if they are experiencing difficulty due to a disability.



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