

The Power of First Impressions

Years ago there was a popular book titled "The First Four Minutes". The point of the book was that people make lasting impressions in the first four minutes of contact. I think in our fast paced world, that time frame has been reduced to 40 seconds and not four minutes.

What can we do to insure that our company makes a positive, lasting first impression? The following ideas can make a difference. They are all simple ideas, but not always easy to do. Practice them on a daily basis.

1. Greet customers as guests. Greeting customers takes place long before the first word is spoken. As they enter the parking lot they are forming impressions. More impressions are added as they enter the building and approach your work station. Remember the 10/10 rule, greet the customer when they are within ten feet of you or have been there 10 seconds. Remember your greeting does not have to be spoken. If you're on the phone, make eye contact and nod. Make sure that the customer knows that they are important to you.

2. Smile. William James, the Harvard Psychologist, said "we don't smile because we're happy, we're happy because we smile". Smiling is contagious and is the single most important factor in putting people at ease. You smile not only with your lips, but with your eyes as well. If your eyes aren't smiling, the smile is seen as insincere. Smile like the customer is a guest in your home. "You never really dressed without a smile".

3. Build Relationships. The secret of powerful first impressions is the ability to begin building a relationship. Ask the customer what name they prefer. Older people may prefer Mr. or Mrs., but don't make an assumption, inquire. Use the customer's name three times in the first few minutes of conversation and you will increase the likelihood that you will remember it in the future. Wear your name tag so it's easy for the customer to remember your name. Notes on the file jacket about your conversation, the grandchildren or favorite sports team can make the customer's next visit a memorable occasion.

4. Check your personal and work place appearance. People make quick judgments regarding appearance. Neat and appropriate are the key words for personal appearance. Your name tag is part of that personal appearance. "A cluttered desk is the sign of a cluttered mind" is the attitude of most of our population. Keep your workspace neat and orderly and your customer's impression becomes that this is a pleasant, positive and effective organization.

5. Enjoy. Your interactions with your customers can be enjoyable and fulfilling. You provide them with important service and they reward you with their continued patronage.

Remember -

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression."