



Even If Your Existing Clients Aren't Buying, Serve Them

by Tom Hopkins

In a perfect world, we'd be so well organized and good about fulfilling our sales and service duties that we'd never neglect any of our clients. But, we're human. Things happen. And, we will find ourselves in positions where we haven't given our best service to a client or two. It's easy to do in the current economic climate when existing clients tell you they just aren't buying. You still have to make sales. So, you invest the majority of your time on finding new business instead of servicing the old. The result? Neglected clients.

Hopefully, this doesn't happen to you often. However, accountability is the name of the game in sales. You are compensated based on how satisfied your clients are. If you aren't happy with your compensation, chances are some of your clients aren't happy with your service. Even if they tell you things are slow and they're not ordering, you must keep up the same level of service you provided them when they were making regular purchases. If you can't possibly do that, you'll soon find yourself in some awkward situations with them. Again, with accountability comes the admission that you just haven't done your job to the best of your ability.

As difficult as it may be to work up the courage for it, your best approach with a neglected client will be the same one used when you first gained their business. If your primary method of contact with them was an in-person meeting, you should get eyeball-to-eyeball with them again. If you first earned their business over the telephone, call them.

You can expect the ignored client to be anything from neutral to giving you the cold shoulder to being outright hostile about your lack of service. And you will deserve whatever they give you. However, once you decide the value of keeping their business is more important than a bit of being taken to task or having them threaten to leave you, it's not so hard to do.

The first step is to admit your lack of service to them. No excuses. The words you use will be critical. . . . If they really haven't minded being left to their own devices, they'll tell you and you'll move right into a discussion of what's been happening with them or their company—listening to cues as to how you can help them now with products or just better service.

When a client gives you the cold shoulder and makes it difficult for you to regain their trust,

you have to humble yourself and slowly work your way back into their good graces. Trust, once broken, is so hard to recover. But, it can be done if both parties are willing. You may need to start with no sales, but service. . . . By providing extra care and proper follow-up service, you should soon find yourself earning their full trust and business.

If any of your clients are angry because of your lack of service, and are more than happy to tell you about it, look at the bright side. They're still talking to you—even if it's not with words you like to hear. Since you know you deserve it, let them vent. Eventually, they'll run out of steam and calm down. Get them talking about how they would like to have their needs served. Once you are onto the positive topic of how you'll work with them in the future, you may just find yourself keeping their business.

If they truly enjoy your product or service, you may just need to apologize and promise to do better now and into the future. It's best if you are specific about how you'll do that. . . . If a situation of neglect has occurred, you had better be sincere about rectifying it. . . . You never want to operate from a position of fear. Always operate from an attitude of servitude if you want to achieve real success in your selling career.

If your clients are having challenges with your product that you've ignored, that's a different story. Ignore them long enough and they may just go away—to the competition—but they'll damage your reputation (and possibly that of your company) along the way. If you're a true professional in this business, you won't let things get that far. Staying in touch on a regular basis should prevent this from happening.

It's easy to be loyal to someone when you're personally acquainted. Think about where you do business. Do you always go to a certain dry cleaner or grocery store? Is it just because they're convenient? Or, is going there a habit that began with excellent service? Have you even done any comparison shopping to find out if there's a better business for your needs? Chances are you continue to frequent certain businesses because you know them and they know you. There's a high level of comfort there.

We are creatures of habit and don't often seek out change unless we're unhappy where we are. But how did you get there in the first place?

I have frequented the same dry cleaner for years. Initially, I started going there because it was convenient to my home. I have since moved to a different neighborhood but still go to the same cleaners.

In my daily travels around town, I probably pass three or four other dry cleaners that may have the same service (or better, or more economical) and might even be more convenient for me but I don't even give them a second glance. I'm loyal to my dry cleaner. Why? Their staff always greets me with a smile. Many have been there for years and know me by name. They do a good job and my items are always ready on time. They've gone the extra mile for me on a few

occasions when I needed a rush job or minor repair. It all boils down to this: they make me feel good about doing business with them. Ultimately, that's our goal as sales professionals. Do your clients feel good about doing business with you? If not, you have some work to do. Consider your clients as the individuals they are and come up with better ways to serve their specific needs. Individualized attention is a long way from neglect.

If your clients do continue to do business with you because you make them feel good about doing so, congratulations! You're bound to achieve success.

Excerpted from master sales trainer Tom Hopkins' newest book, *Selling in Tough Times* (Hachette Books, 2010). For more information, visit www.tomhopkins.com.