



The Raphael Report

Observations on marketing, advertising, sales and promotions
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Cut Out the Complaints And Most People Have Nothing To Say

“I went to a restaurant last night and had a terrible meal.”

“My computer is always freezing!”

“Did you get your tax bill from the city? Outrageous!”

“The post office delivered my sale mailers one week after the sale started.”

Listen to people talk. Hear them complain, criticize and categorize an event that happened in their day, year, life ... all in a negative manner.

I have a sentence that summarizes that attitude. Here it is: “Cut out the complaints and most people have nothing to say.”

The opening quotations are good examples.

The reason for complaints is conditioning. We are products of our environment. We copy the attitude, philosophy and thoughts that surround us.

Listen to the conversations. Criticism of people with higher authority (the parent, the boss, the elected official).

Read the mail. A study showed if customers have something bad to say about your business they are five times more apt to write you than if they have something good to say.

Read/watch/listen to the media. Riots. Murders. Fires. Disasters. The news is overwhelmingly bad and we are quickly conditioned to the fact that the norm is negative. (Old newsroom philosophy on positioning news: “If it bleeds, it leads.”)

This soon becomes a mindset. We become conditioned to negative thinking.

Why not think positive and have positive results?

FACT: The more we compliment instead of criticize, the greater we increase the odds of success. A *New York Times* article quoted authorities that said the most successful transactions are those where people enter into a buyer-seller relationship in a cooperative, not competitive, frame of mind.

Unfortunately, paying for service does not always guarantee the quality of service. Our rule of thumb is simple: What’s the goal? Do we want the merchandise in our store on time? Do we want the post office to deliver our mailers on time?

Good. Then we must start thinking of complimenting instead of criticizing.

We tend to think of people to whom we pay for a service as antagonists rather than as partners in a common goal. “I paid for this so I should get the best possible service.” Well, that would be nice. But it simply doesn’t work that way much of the time. Now – how can you make it work that way?

Success will come your way with much less concern, aggravation and worry when you start thinking of the buyer-seller exchange as opportunities for mutual gain instead of winner-takes-all.

Gwendolyn Thomas Marx, a professional singer says, “I go back to the same stores and to the same sales help in the stores where I shop. I chat. I ask them how they’re doing. How has their day been?”

Result: "I get better service. The old hands expect me back. The new people find out I'm not someone who is going to shop there once and walk away."

OK, how does this philosophy work in YOUR business? Here are some ideas to try. We did. They work.

1. Ask for help. We send a copy of our mailers Priority Mail with a personal letter to all the postmasters in the zip codes where our mailer will be delivered. We point out the starting day of the sale. We ask them to please call us if the mailers do not arrive in time. Now the mailing piece is not just another mailing - it is a specific mailing. We request their help instead of demanding. Deliveries improved at once!

2. Involve the ubiquitous "Them." The more you involve a supplier or service with your decision-making, the more you make them responsible to do a better job for you. Offer different solutions for a shipping or buying problem (any one of which is acceptable to you). Now THEY have made the decision and now THEY have responsibility for follow through.

Example: Ask the manufacturer for a specific date when they will ship their merchandise to your business. Have him write down the date on your order blank – and watch the faster deliveries.

3. Compliment service. When our mailer arrives at customers' homes on time, we send a note thanking the postmaster for taking care of us. Do the same with your suppliers thanking them for (a) prompt delivery (b) excellent quality (c) superb design (d) fill in the compliment. These notes will find their way to the bulletin board or the home office. Few do this. People only write or call with bad news. ("Cut out the complaints and most people . . .")

NOW - the next time there is a shipment to leave the factory, guess whose name will be at the top of the list? The next time you need reorders on a hot selling item, guess who receives preferential service? The next time that...well, you get the idea.

What happens when a customer comes to your business dissatisfied, unhappy? They are ready for an adversarial relationship. Time to change the atmosphere from "Who will win?" to "How can we both win?"

When you have established a reputation for "wanting to help," customers feel comfortable approaching you. They come to you because you are the expert and they trust you to make the right decision.

Can you? Oh, yes! And if the phone rings while you're talking to the customer and someone says the call is for you say, "Hold all my calls. I can't be disturbed. I have a very important customer."

Stop.

You've solved their problem, whatever it is!

Because they asked you for help. And you cut out the complaint. And they had nothing to say.