

CUSTOMER RELATIONS

A Course in Management



Professional Certified Florists' Program

PUBLISHED BY
Texas State Florists' Association
PO Box 170760; Austin TX 78717
For Information: 512.834.0361

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PO Box 170760
Austin, Texas 78717
United States of America

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PO Box 170760
Austin, Texas 78717
United States of America
Revised 10/96, 04/07, 04/12, 06/12

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Customer Relations

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I. INTRODUCTION

In today's market, our thoughts, plans and directions must be focused on those who make our business and its success possible, the CUSTOMER.

It is critically important that we treat this customer in such a way that they will want and need to stay with us. This support will solidify our base.

Research today indicates that the #1 key ingredient in operating a successful business is providing positively outrageous service. That is, service which is totally unexpected, out of proportion, out of the way. Further, those businesses who do not provide this quality will be the ones who will lose out — they will not be profitable.

The customer comes to us with their own individual expectations of how they feel their encounter should go. Then, they leave with an experience. Developing a customer orientation is an ongoing process and an uphill struggle.

This course attempts to give some insight and understanding regarding customer expectations, and buying styles with the main emphasis on customer satisfaction. Once we have satisfied the customer, then we can begin to provide that special feature of the floral industry, SERVICE.

II. CUSTOMER SURVEY

“The customer is the key to a successful retail service oriented business. Without the customer there is no demand for our product or our services.”

— Henry Ford

To better understand your customer it is important to take an informal inventory of yourself, your customers, and your business. We have included a sample inventory and survey to help you get started.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMER’S NEEDS AN INFORMAL INVENTORY

Yourself

Think of yourself as a customer. What irks you most when you shop in another store?:

- Transactions take too long because the clerk is slow at the cash register or not familiar with handling credit card purchases.
- The prices are not clearly marked on items, so you have to find a clerk and ask for the information.
- The clerks know too little about the merchandise or prices and cannot offer advice.
- The shop (windows, floor, counter) is dirty or very messy.
- The merchandise is dusty or looks uncared for.

Now go back and rate your shop on these same points.

Your Customer

Can you identify a target market for your shop? Perhaps these questions will get you started.

- What percentage of your customers are male? What percentage are female?
- What is the median age of your customers?
- What is the average amount that walk-in customers are willing to spend on an arrangement? For what person or purpose do walk-in customers typically purchase arrangements? For their home, their spouse, for a party they’re attending or for a birthday?
- What is the average amount that phone customers are willing to spend?
- For what purpose or person do they typically purchase arrangements?
- What made your phone customers decide to call you instead of another florist?
- What makes a customer decide to purchase on your website instead of another florists?
- What basic colors do people request for arrangements?
- What flowers do people typically request for their arrangements?
- Are your customers increasingly requesting flowers by name (in other words, does a typical customer know more about flowers than in previous years)?
- Do customers request a certain type of container?
- How often do they comment on the container?
- Are your walk-in customers typically in a hurry or do they have time to browse?

YOUR BUSINESS

Your business profile is a composite of your customers' purchasing decisions. How well do you know your business?

- What is the average number of statements you send out each month?
- How many new accounts are opened at your shop each month?
- What is the average number of walk-ins per week?
- What is the average number of phone sales per week?
- What are the average number of internet orders each week?
- What have you done in the past month in the way of window displays, sales or advertising to increase business?
- What are the three best selling flowers in your shop?
- What percentage of your business is:
 - ___ weddings
 - ___ funerals
 - ___ special occasion
 - ___ walk-in
 - ___ phone
 - ___ wire order
 - ___ giftware items
 - ___ online
- How many ready-made arrangements do you sell each week?
- What is the average length of a business transaction?
- What do your customers find most attractive about your shop?
- What do your customers find least attractive about your shop?

Pick out the questions that concern you the most and start finding out what your customers want in these areas.

One way to determine how customers perceive you and your business would be through the use of a survey.

These could be emailed to your entire customer base offering an incentive for their return. Further, a survey card could be available in the show room for walk-in customers. Offer a discount for a free flower if that customer would take the time to complete this brief survey.

Another method of determining just how customers perceive you and your business would be through a customer advisory committee. Select six to ten customers from your base. Have them meet monthly to discuss their perception and feelings about how you could improve certain areas of your business. Always thank each member of this committee after the meeting with the delivery of fresh flowers or a plant.

It is recommended that customers are selected representing a wide range of spending—from one who may spend \$25.00 a year to the largest commercial account you might have.

The following survey is only one example of the type a retailer might use.

SURVEY

1. Please rate the following goods and services. If you are uncertain about a particular item, just circle the number one in the column marked No Opinion.

| | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor | No Opinion |
|--|-----------|------|------|------|------------|
| A. Prices | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| B. Sales Help (in store) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| C. Sales help (phone) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| D. Cut Flower Variety | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| E. Green plant Variety | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| F. Blooming plant variety | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| G. Other merchandise (giftware, vases, etc) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| H. Discount specials | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I. Arrangements | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| J. Displays | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| K. Delivery | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| L. Parking | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| M. Location | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| N. Overall service | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| O. Website ease of use | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

2. How often do you visit our shop? (check one)

- Once a week
- Once a month
- Several times a year
- First Visit

3. How did you hear about our shop? (check as many as apply).

- Newspaper, radio or television ad
- Yellow pages listing
- Outside sign
- Facebook/Social Media
- Other (please specify)

4. How many other flower shops do you do business with?
- One to two
 - Three to four
 - Four to five
 - None
5. Do you have an account with us?
- Yes
 - No
6. Would you come into our shop and buy more flowers from us if they were discount priced?
- Yes
 - No

7. What other products, features or services would you like us to provide? (Write in space below).

8. What other comments do you have about our shop? Remember: It's important to let us know how we can better serve you. (Write in space below).

III. SPECIALITY RETAILING

In analyzing the retail floral industry, the same comment comes up time after time in the trade press, industry meetings and discussions. The retail marketplace will exist in three forms — the mass market, the well managed specialty retailer and the Internet.

As we further examine those areas that the value-seeking customer of today is searching, we find in that specialty retailer four areas that are well addressed to insure the success of that establishment. These four areas are service, quality of product, atmosphere and price value relationship. Let's take a moment to discuss each of these.

SERVICE

Service is the calling card of the floral industry — it is what sets us apart and makes us unique and different. To maximize this element of our business maximizes our ability to be successful in our efforts.

QUALITY OF PRODUCT

Today's retailer must demand from its supplier the absolute best in quality in order to receive the kind of value today's consumer is seeking. Quality, not quantity, is of most importance to today's and tomorrow's discriminating consumer.

ATMOSPHERE

The Merchandising course covers, in depth, the subject of merchandising and a variety of techniques that can create shop appeal. To create an experience for your customers, to create a reason to open the door and come in, and to create an atmosphere that is pleasing are important aspects of building good relationships with your customers.

PRICE VALUE RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between the price charged and the quality received relates to the value perceived by today's customer. From design issues to long lasting freshness to customer service issues, each constitutes significantly to the total perception of value. Price value relationship is one of the most important issues of today. Today's customer is looking for VALUE.

IV. CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

The industry findings are in direct collation with customer expectations. Consumers evaluate businesses by how those operations meet their service and product quality expectations. Some of the areas of primary concern are:

1. Product quality and fair value. Money is not usually an issue when quality and value are evident.
2. Guarantee — Customers are reassured by a guarantee. It also shows that the business is proud of the product.
3. Accessible Merchandise — If the customer cannot pick up an item and look at it, chances are he won't buy it. Example: An elaborate table setting used for display may effectively show off your merchandise, but customers will not feel free to handle anything on that table. Likewise, good photos must be used on your e-commerce site.
4. Visible Pricing — Everything should have a visible price tag. An item in a jewelry store window catches your eye. The price tag is not visible. Do you go in and ask the price or walk away?
5. Personal Service — make them feel welcome with a warm smile and friendly hello. Encourage them to browse and make them feel comfortable while doing so. They are sure to return.
6. Updated e-commerce site. Ex: Remove press after holiday, etc.

To insure success in these 5 areas, you need personnel who are sensitive to the customer's need, skilled enough to meet those needs and knowledgeable about and proud of the product they are selling.

V. MATCHING SELLING AND BUYING STYLES

Have you ever had so much difficulty selling to a particular customer that you felt like you were trying to sell ice cubes to an Eskimo? The same customer returns a few days later, one of your co-workers assists her, and makes a sale in five minutes. The reason that you had so much difficulty is that your selling style and the customer's buying style did not match.

You cannot change an individual's buying habits, but you can adapt your selling techniques to harmonize with their personality. If you try to force the customer to meet your selling style, you will most probably lose the customer. Listening is the key to selling success. The customer will tell you what they want, you just have to hear it. At that point, you can make suggestions.

People will display certain types of behavior when they call or come into your shop. The skillful salesperson will be able to recognize and interpret each type and adjust his/her selling technique accordingly. This results in trust, rapport and buying confidence on the part of the customer.

Let's look at the different buying styles, the personality traits involved in them and how to sell to each one.

A. HOW DOES THE CUSTOMER MANAGE HIM/HERSELF?

People manage themselves in one of two ways — open or self-contained.

1. The open customer openly shows her feelings and emotions. She is personable, relaxed, informal and responsive when talking with you. She likes to share her feelings with you and is usually not in a rush to conclude the sale.
2. The self-contained customer is just the opposite — formal, proper and hesitant to show emotions. They like to order flowers as quickly as possible and are mainly concerned with product value. The buying decision is made on the basis of facts not feelings.

B. HOW DOES THE CUSTOMER MANAGE INFORMATION?

Next you must decide if your customer manages information directly or indirectly.

1. The quiet, shy person who has difficulty making a decision handles information indirectly. She will probably ask your opinion and opt for the selection that represents the least amount of risk.
2. One who manages information directly usually controls the conversation, expresses her opinion and makes quick decisions. This type is irritated by indifferent salespeople.

BUYING STYLES

When we combine the four factors on how customers manage themselves and information, it results in four different customer buying styles. They are the Socializer, the Thinker, the Director, and the Relater. Each one has its strengths and weaknesses and no one is any better than the other. We all have traits from each of the four styles, but one style usually stands out from the other. If you can identify your customer's buying style, you can adjust your selling technique accordingly.

1. **The Socializer** — displays open behavior and manages information directly. Details are not important to this person. She is fast-paced and spontaneous. She likes people and works well with them.

When selling to this buyer style, give her time to talk, make sure your suggestions meet her needs, be interested and enthusiastic. Confirm all details in writing and make sure she understands all costs involved.

2. **The Thinker** — exhibits self-contained behavior and manages information indirectly. She is a cautious buyer who is finely attuned to minute details. She requires everything in writing and asks lots of questions. Criticism and a need to be right are also traits.

In selling to her, be confident, organized, knowledgeable and, above all, totally professional. Sometimes the actual product is not as important to her as the service and follow-through. She needs to make a logical decision so be sure to list the advantages and disadvantages of each product selection. Be cordial, but not social.

3. **The Director** — shows self-contained behavior and manages information directly. This person needs her flowers yesterday and is always in a hurry. She takes control of the selling situation and usually knows what she wants to buy. Stubbornness and impatience are sure traits.

When selling to her, be businesslike, direct and to the point. Make suggestions that surely meet her needs, let her do the choosing and be sure to follow through.

Always keep in mind you are the Professional Florist. You should be prepared to answer any questions the customers may have.

4. **The Relater** — displays open behavior and manages information indirectly. She is easy to please, but has difficulty making decisions. She is shy, but, reliable.

When selling to this buyer style, be friendly. This person will appreciate your suggestions. She loves to be complimented.

VI. THE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL SELLING

There are three key elements of successful selling. They are the Greeting, the Presentation and the Closing.

1. GREETING

- A. Be friendly, prompt, courteous and businesslike:
“Thank you for calling ___ florist. This is ___.” Never use “May I help you? Use “How may I help you?”
- B. Learn the customer’s name and use it (5 times). “How is your account listed_____?”
- C. Make the customer feel important.
- D. Talk favorably about merchandise. “Enthusiastic/Smile” Use descriptive words “What is the occasion?”

2. PRESENTATION

- A. Ask questions, listen, learn what the customer wants. Be knowledgeable, know what is available. What is the occasion?
- B. Place customer’s interests first.
- C. Suggest merchandise which BEST FITS THE NEED. Sell pre-made, sell right things to right customers, be knowledgeable about price. Limit the alternatives, match your style to the customer’s style.
- D. Suggest its actual use.
- E. Give the benefit of the item. ie. What it will do for them
- F. Let customer handle the merchandise.
- G. Don’t talk too much.

3. CLOSE

- A. Help the customer decide.
- B. Ask which items the customer prefers. “That sounds good.”
- C. Remove unwanted merchandise from site.
- D. Use utmost tact.
- E. Assume sale has been made. “Will this be cash or credit?”
- F. Write all details on the order.
- G. Compliment them on their selection.
- H. Thank you!
- I. Please call again/come back again.

VII. IN-HOUSE SALES

MEETING THE CUSTOMER

First impressions are usually made with the eyes, not the ears. The appearance of your sales help is as important to your business as the display in your window or the decor of your shop. Their dress should be appropriate for their environment; it must be neat, and should be relatively conservative. Your clientele and your business location may influence the appropriate dress for your sales staff.

Your sales staff is your “front-line.” Their appearance and manner is a direct reflection on your shop and its quality. This is especially important to keep in mind at holiday time when temporary help is often called upon.

It is important to remember when meeting the customer to:

1. Smile
2. Be open and friendly
3. Maintain eye contact
4. Use the customer’s name
5. Allow personal space
6. Listen

Communication is 10% words, 40% voice tone, and 50% body language.

TELEPHONE SALES TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE

Perhaps much of your sales and service is done in person, What about the telephone business? Wire Orders? Customer inquiries? Complaints? The telephone is a big part of our life, and using it effectively is an acquired art!

Take time to listen to your employees on the phone. Practice “Management by Walking Around” when possible, and listen to how the telephone is being used in your Customer Service program. Are callers being responded to quickly and pleasantly? Are messages, and orders being taken neatly and completely? Telephone skills are learned, and must be practiced to stay sharp. Improper telephone handling can mean poor customer impressions and lost business for your shop. Weekly role playing is a great way to stay sharp on phone skills.

TELEPHONE BASICS

SETTING STANDARDS

- Answer within 2-3 rings
- Defined Salutations. “Thank you for calling ___ florist. This is _____.
- Talk with a smile. Keep a mirror near the phone! Be enthusiastic!
- On hold — Don’t forget the Customer! Do not use slang phrases such as “Hang on a minute.”
- Gathering information. Be knowledgeable; know what is available, limit the alternatives, approach information in a logical order.
- Repeating Messages (orders)
- Names... Yours and Theirs. This is _____. How is your account listed? _____
- Return Calls

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOICE?

1. **ALERTNESS**
Give the impression you are wide-awake and alert, interested in the calling person.
2. **PLEASANTNESS**
Build a pleasant Company image with a “Voice with a Smile.” Pleasantness is contagious.
3. **NATURALNESS**
Use simple, straight-forward language. Avoid repetition of mechanical words or phrases — particularly avoid technical terms and slang.
4. **DISTINCTNESS**
Speak clearly and distinctly. Open your mouth so the sound can come out. Move the lips, tongue and jaw freely. Talk directly into the transmitter.
5. **EXPRESSIVENESS**
A well modulated voice carries best over the telephone. Use a normal tone of voice, neither too fast nor too slow. Vary your tone of voice. It will bring out the meaning of sentences and add color and vitality to what you say. Your voice reports whether or not you are thinking. If your mind is dull your voice will be likewise. If you think and feel what you say, expression will find its way naturally into your voice.

KEYS TO GOOD LISTENING

LIMIT YOUR OWN TALKING: You can't talk and listen at the same time.

THINK LIKE THE CUSTOMER: His problem and needs are important.... and you'll understand and retain them better if you keep his point of view.

ASK QUESTIONS: If you don't understand something... or feel you may have missed a point... clear it up now before it embarrasses you later.

DON'T INTERRUPT: A pause...even a long pause ... doesn't always mean he finished saying everything he wants to.

CONCENTRATE: Focus your mind on what he's saying. Practice shutting out outside distractions.

TAKE NOTES: This will help you remember important points. But ... be selective. Trying to note down everything he says can result in being left far behind or in retaining irrelevant details.

LISTEN FOR IDEAS...NOT JUST WORDS: You want to get the whole picture... not just isolated bits and pieces.

LISTEN FOR OVERTONES: You can learn a great deal about the customer from the way he says things ... the way he reacts to the things you say.

INTERJECTIONS: An occasional, "Yes"... "I See" ... etc ... shows the customer you're still with him...but don't overdo or use as a meaningless comment.

TURN OFF YOUR OWN WORRIES: This isn't always easy ... but personal fears, worries, problems not connected with contact, form a kind of "static" that can blank out the customer's message.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE: Remarks and questions prepared in advance... when possible... free your mind for listening.

REACT TO IDEAS...NOT THE PERSON: Don't allow irritation at things he may say... or at his manner... to distract you.

DON'T ARGUE MENTALLY: Don't allow irritation at things he may say... or at his manner... to distract you.

DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS: Avoid making unwarranted assumptions about what the customer is going to say ... or mentally trying to complete his sentences for him.

PRACTICE LISTENING: make your conversations with your friends, your family, the people who serve you in the places you buy, a tool for improving listening skills ... for "sharpening your inner ear."

YOUR VOICE

Make your voice an asset at all times and under all circumstances. The impressions we make over the telephone are important... more important perhaps than most of us realize. In both business and social life our voices over the telephone reflect our personalities. When meeting people face-to-face, poor diction may often be excused because of a winning smile or warm personality.

VIII. WEBSITE SALES

Your website is an extension of your brick and mortar business. It should have a look and feel about it that mirrors your style. Your offerings should be personal creations that look different than the other florists in your community. With a simple point and shoot camera and one of the many photo editing programs available, you can make any bouquet look like a professional took it. You should regularly update the pictures on your website and make sure you have holiday pictures up well in advance of the holiday and remove them after the holiday. A stale site can hurt more than it can help. A major problem with websites is they do not get the attention of your showroom. Your website is just as important if not more important than your brick and mortar showroom and should be treated as such. A website should be an ecommerce site that allows people to order online, as the majority of people will want to order from the site. That being said, you should have your phone number listed prominently throughout the site because people will want to use the site as a menu and call. You should also have an email address listed in the contact section for those who do not want to call. This email should be monitored and all emails should be responded to within hours of the email or you risk missing that order. When an order is placed on your website the sender assumes the arrangement will look just like the picture. If a substitution is needed that will change the look of the arrangement you will need to contact the sender or risk a complaint.

IX. EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing is still one of the least expensive and easiest ways to market to current customers. Many of the email services offer both template and html canvases so you can be as simple or complex as you want with your emails. Make sure your emails lead the customer to the correct section of the site. EX: if you send an email out about Valentines, the email is linked to the Valentines section of the site. Make sure to get your customers permission before you email them and follow all CAN-SPAM email rules.

X. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

We all want to insure that we do not lose customers and do whatever we can to attract new ones. There are several basic principles which, when followed, will help assure customer satisfaction.

1. Please the customer — he will continue to buy from you.
2. Stay in touch with your customers and bring in new ones through letters, telephone, direct mail, email and social media.
3. Smile when handling complaints. The customer is always right whether you think so or not. Don't take it personally.
4. Be dependable — You are a professional. Attend to details and fulfill promises.
5. Service is the key word. Customers want and expect it. Always provide outstanding and unexpected SERVICE.
6. Show your sincere appreciation. Make your customer feel important.

XI. CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION

There are several reasons why businesses lose customers. Statistics show that for each retail firm:

- 1% die
- 3% move
- 5% go to establishments operated by friends of the retailer
- 9% quit because of price
- 14% leave because of unadjusted complaints
- 68% leave due to lack of attention or indifference on the part of sales personnel.

Let's look at some of the most common consumer complaints that we receive in our industry and consider some of the possible solutions to those problems.

1. Wilted blooms or buds that fail to open.

SOLUTION: Offer guarantee or warranties. Stand by this. Proper conditioning of flowers by the retailer. Include care card with each delivery.

2. Substitutions

SOLUTION: Consumer should be advised of this possibility and that full value will be given in the substitutions.

3. Poor Arrangements

SOLUTION: Try to employ trained and qualified design staff.

4. Undesirable Containers

SOLUTION: Always try to use specified container. If not, notify customer and recipient.

5. Delivery Damage

SOLUTION: Develop effective packaging methods. Offer to replace damaged product with identical one or one of equal value. Train delivery personnel in proper handling of delivery items.

If there is a problem, try to fix it at all cost. Today, people not only tell their neighbors and friends about bad experiences, they tell the whole world with online reviews.

HANDLING DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

Every business has “difficult” customers. People who are angry and frustrated with a situation and who take it out on the person behind the counter or on the phone. It’s never easy to deal with angry customers but there are certain things to keep in mind that can streamline the complaint handling process.

- Maintain a friendly and professional attitude
- Acknowledge that a difficult situation exists
- Understand the situation — you have been in their shoes at some point
- Calm the customer by questioning and verifying
- Focus the customer on the problem
- Handle the problem

ARRIVING AT A SOLUTION

Try to resolve as quickly as possible. Empower your staff to solve problem. Many complaints will be of such a nature that they cannot be resolved to the customer’s satisfaction during the initial conversation — either you or your customer may need to get additional information. In these cases there is a psychological tool that can be used to your advantage.

After assuring your customer that you will do everything reasonable to resolve the matter, tell him that you will call him back. Usually, the person initiating a business telephone call has an advantage. This also gives your customer the opportunity to settle down, and become easier to deal with.

If you find that you cannot arrive at the resolution of the problem by the promised time, call the customer anyway to let him know that you’re still working on it.

Once you have reached the point where a proposed solution to the problem must be offered, always try to speak in POSITIVE, rather than negative terms. Try to avoid telling the customer what you can’t do. Instead, focus on what you can do.

YOUR ROLE IN COMPLAINT HANDLING

When an unhappy customer reaches you, try to keep in mind that the customer has a problem that he feels is serious enough to warrant the attention of the “top brass.” Think of complaints as opportunities for information and improvement, and for keeping a customer.

Customers want to be heard. A great deal of customer alienation can be traced back to the fact that no one was willing to listen. Listening is your most powerful tool when taking a customer complaint. To begin with, most customers will instantly become easier to deal with. The opportunity to release frustration to someone who is willing to listen is a sure way to calm down even the most irate customer.

THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB

Handling complaints is not an easy task, even with the best guidelines. Customer relations is a very exacting job; don't expect your employees to know how to handle complaints on instinct alone.

Be aware of basic human nature too. Not every one has the sort of temperament required to deal with irate customers, either on the telephone or in face to face confrontations. An employee can be an invaluable asset in one capacity but a total disaster when it comes to dealing with customer problems. It's up to you to be perceptive enough to spot this kind of situation and to take steps to correct it.

YOU CAN'T PLEASE ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME

Every now and then, despite your most determined efforts, it will become necessary for you to refuse some particularly outrageous demand or unjustified complaint. When that happens remember that there is a right way and a wrong way to say "no."

The real challenge in saying "no" to a customer is in being able to do so without losing his business. To refuse a customer's request while retaining his goodwill, requires the best of your professional skills.

When you are involved in a difficult customer situation the important part is not in deciding whether the customer is right or wrong. The customer who has persisted until his complaint reached you is certain in his own mind that he has a justifiable complaint. Even where the circumstances seem to contradict the customer's claims, it is important to avoid challenging him in a direct way. Your job is to bring the matter to a conclusion without alienating the customer, even when you have to say "no." Although, saying "no" should be very rare.

HOW TO SAY “NO”

When faced with the unpleasant task of refusing a customer, it is important to remember the “right” way of saying “no.”

Avoid a flat turndown without a proper explanation of why you are unable to satisfy the customer’s demand and how hard you tried to do so. Let him know that you stretched your thinking to the limit in your attempt to find a way to say “yes.” If some of the facts appear to be in contradiction to the customer’s claims, avoid any direct challenge that might embarrass him. Embarrassment often causes a customer to become defensive and even more difficult to deal with.

Make liberal use of such phrases as “I can certainly understand why you felt the way you did.” These are good ways to avoid having the customer conclude that you regard him as an adversary. Finally, don’t forget to let the customer know that you value his patronage and that you sincerely hope that it will continue.

Despite the number of customers who may not show any outward sign of favorable response, you’ll be surprised at how many will return to do business with you again.

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT?

What do you do when the customer is not “always right?” All of us have heard and have probably tried to live by the old saying “The Customer Is Always Right.” Well, the fact is that the customer is not always right. Customers are sometimes prone to exaggerate their problems and to seek unrealistic concessions. To pretend that unreasonable or even dishonest customers don’t exist, would be unfair to the overwhelming majority who are neither of these things. Most people expect nothing more than the satisfaction they have paid for.

The intent behind this phrase however, is faultless. But perhaps it is more realistic if phrased differently. It must be communicated to all employees that **A CUSTOMER — RIGHT OR WRONG — IS TO BE SATISFIED.**

Try to never say NO. No is never good. It will either cost you a customer or an order.

XII. CUSTOMER EDUCATION

Our own industry is very much at fault concerning the lack of consumer knowledge of plants and flower care. We must use all possible opportunities (some are free) to provide information in these areas. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and the media, properly approached and utilized, would be a most effective way to educate the public.

Garden clubs and civic and church groups usually welcome programs offered by our industry. Take your product to these people and talk about areas that concern them.

Some florist shops offer classes in floral design and plant care strictly for the consumer. They work in areas that cause the retailer the great amount of complaint. This helps the consumer understand our problems and recognize the true trouble signals in fresh materials. Consider placing How To Videos on YouTube and the section of your website about plants and flower care.

XIII. CUSTOMER ETIQUETTE

In summary, we often become so busy and preoccupied with our daily workload that we forget or dismiss the importance of caring for our customers as well as our flowers. Occasionally, we need to take time to review our customer relations policies and refresh our image.

It is suggested that each shop develop a policy manual applicable to customer relations to be reviewed with employees on a regular basis as per your location and customer base. Some of the basic policies to include could be: delivery policies, product guarantees and complaint adjustments. Educate your employees about your consumer policies so they can offer better service to your customers. Your employees should adhere to these policies and be responsible for their own actions with your customers.

Guidelines for sales procedures, courtesy, telephone procedures and special holiday rules could also be included in the manual. Inform your customers of your guarantees and holiday policies so there will be fewer misunderstandings in the future. Keep your manual handy and update and review the policies regularly with new, part-time and permanent employees.

XIV. WHAT IS CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Customer Service as a practice provides a system to ensure customer satisfaction and support for goods or services.

Quality customer service can only be accomplished through positive human interactions, courtesy, care, and communication.

Customer Service is deliberate: it requires company policy statements and established review procedures. First and last impressions are most remembered by the customer.. you have only one chance for each.

Customer service includes offering the customer options to purchase, friendly employees, and efficient service.

Customer Service means the customer should never have to ask for anything. Customer service is not natural: it must be practiced and practiced. Excellent customer service is doing something that is beyond expectations.

WHY IS CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPORTANT

Sophisticated technology and manufacturing techniques have been instrumental in developing an infinitely more perceptive and demanding consumer. Producers and sellers of consumer goods must be sensitive to the demands of their customers and to the role played by service in the modern merchandising equation. More important to today's business person than the cost of service, is the cost of no service — or poor service.

Consumers have shown that they will return to do business with firms that have treated them fairly and made reasonable efforts to resolve their complaints. If mistreated, they simply take their business to a more accommodating competitor and with the strong influence of social media they will let everyone know your firm's shortcomings.

YOUR ROLE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

As shop owners, you are Service Managers, and it is your job, and that of the people working with you to see to it that your shop's most valuable assets — its customers — are treated in such a manner as to cause them to want to do business with you again.

Quality customer service results in customer satisfaction, and that goes directly to your "bottom line." Good customer relations is good business — it makes financial sense! The way to make a business successful is to see to it that its customers are satisfied.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

There is only one boss, and whether a person shines shoes for a living or heads up the biggest corporation in the world, the boss remains the same. **IT'S THE CUSTOMER.** He is the person who pays everyone's salary and who decides whether a business is going to succeed or fail. And he doesn't care if a business has been around for 100 years. The minute it starts treating him badly, he'll put it out of business.

The boss, **THE CUSTOMER**, has bought and will buy everything you have or will have. He's bought all of your clothes, your home, your car, pays for your children's education and your vacations. He pays all of your bills, and he pays in exact proportion to the way you treat him.

The man who works deep inside a big office building or plant might think he's working for the company that writes his paychecks, but he is not. He is working for the person who buys the product at the end of the line. In fact, **THE CUSTOMER** will fire everybody in the company from the President on down. And he can do it simply by spending his money somewhere else.

"Some of the largest companies that had flourishing business a few years ago are no longer in existence. They couldn't or didn't satisfy the customer. They forgot who the boss really was."

— Author Unknown

"A CUSTOMER" **(First published by Ann Landers)**

- Is the most important person in any business.
- Is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him.
- Is not an interruption of our work, he is the purpose of it.
- Does us a favor when he calls; we are not doing him a favor by serving him.
- Is a part of our business, not an outsider.
- Is not a cold statistic, he is a flesh and blood human being with feelings and emotions like our own.
- Is not someone to argue or match wits with.
- Is a person who brings us his wants; it is our job to fill those wants.
- Is deserving of the most courteous and attentive treatment we can give him.
- Is the fellow that makes it possible to pay your salary whether you are a truck driver, plant employee, office employee, salesman, or manager.
- Is the lifeblood of this and every business

Appendix 1

**SAMPLE
COMPLAINT FORM**

Date: _____

Order No. _____

Name of Person Who Took This Order _____

Approximate Time: _____

Ordered by: _____

Phone: _____

PROBLEM: _____

Delivered by: _____

Contacted: _____

Being Checked in: _____

Replacement Order No. _____

Adjustment: _____

Original item picked up by: _____

Date: _____