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## The 5-Point Foundation for Success



Long before you go to market with, what you believe to be, the very best of all products, you would be well advised to make sure that your entire organization is prepared to meet, or even better, exceed customer requirements within the five subject areas that I've come to know as, "The 5-Point Foundation for Success." Why I refer to them as the foundation is that if your company fails within any one of the five points, the business will collapse!

I first heard of this list of five subjects in 1988, while attending a seminar conducted by renown business consultant and author, Tom Connellan, who presented them as the five buying factors that exist in the minds of customers. While Tom did an excellent job teaching the merit of each, he, like myself, must give credit where credit is due on this great discovery and that credit goes to Professor Leonard L. Barry of Texas A&M University who has spent a career studying the topic of what causes customers to buy.

Since that time, I've spent thirty-one years testing each of these subjects and find them to be profoundly accurate and an absolute must if anyone expects to succeed. What should be noted is that this list of five requirements are arranged in their order of importance, meaning, if the first subject fails to meet or exceed customer requirements the remaining four do not count.

The first subject area is "**Reliability.**" Do your products and services do what has been promised? Just as important, are the people within your organization reliable— do they keep their commitments? If, for any reason, products, services, or people fail to be reliable, no price is low enough to cause customers to buy. The mission of reliability starts and stops at the top of the organization. The daily compliance to this point of foundation must become habit and, while a number of topics are critical for business success, please trust me when I say that "reliability" is number-one!

Number two on the list is "**Responsiveness,**" How well does your organization size up in the mind of customers on quick, efficient and effective communications? Consumer Reports in 2005 issued results from a consumer survey that measured what companies did best to earn customer loyalty. The leading response was that the best companies were those that resolved problems the quickest with the least amount of hassle. While solving problems efficiently makes up a major portion of responsiveness, routine customer communications must also be quick and attentive to needs.

Policies and systems must be put into place that cause your staff to treat all customers with priority. Nothing other than a three-alarm fire in your building provides an acceptable excuse to avoid serving customers *NOW!* Beyond a timely response, everyone's charter is to "solve the problem and save the customer." It doesn't matter who is at fault. There never is a reason to leave customers with a negative impression and there is always a solution, which may go beyond corporate policy, but will deliver an acceptable outcome.

The third subject is “**Assurance.**” Simply put, customers in today’s fast paced world of business are in fear of being left alone—to survive without the help of their expert suppliers. Trust has never been more vital than in this current day and age and companies must be reminded that the more assurance they provide, the greater the customers confidence and resulting referrals. What comes as the weak link in the chain concerning assurance is that, what is often promised, never occurs. What you assure to provide customers relates to the number-one subject of reliability and what rings true is that you must “walk your talk!” Remember, 65% of all business volume is a result of repeat business. Need I say more?

Fourth on the list is “**Empathy**”, which teaches us that it is vital to demonstrate genuine concern for the customer’s feelings. This does not necessitate our agreement with the customer but, instead, provides the right for customers to feel the way they do. One great principle to remember is that we’re all in the “people business” and, until we properly and adequately address the personal needs of the customer through active listening and concern, we’ll never achieve the right to talk business.

The danger zone to avoid when it comes to proper use of empathy is the rush of business. No one seems to have time to do things well anymore; there is too much to do and not enough time, creating pressure and a lack of patience. Customers are very good at helping out when this scenario persists—they reduce the pressure by going somewhere else to do their business. Management had better make sure that they are providing a positive and supportive business environment in which to work if they hope to fulfill the requirement of empathy.

The final subject is entitled, “**Image**”, To understand how well your company complies with this requirement, ask yourself, “Does my company represent an image to whom customers would be proud to associate?” Categorically, the answer to this question should lead a company to assess the topics of cleanliness, knowledge, organization, ethics, integrity, functionality, quality, community, morale and professionalism. Key here is to concentrate on the little things that mean big things to customers. I’ve witnessed customers intentionally missing appointments because of weeds growing in the parking lot.

Whether a business, association, church, or club, making sure that the five foundation points are perfected and maintained will allow for most all goals to be attainable. The greatest building aspect of having an excellent foundation is that you’ll never have cause to remodel; just the opportunity to add more square footage.



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