



The SMMarT Guy

Great Customer Service is Sales

By Kim Robinson

"I'm *not a salesman*," the call center customer service representative practically sneered while making no attempt to conceal her contempt for sales. "I am in customer service."

Oh, I get it. Sales people are evil, but you are a saint because you help people...
What a load of rubbish.

I hear this type of comment every time I begin working with frontline call center personnel, bank tellers, office clerks and others who don't have the actual word "sales" in their job description. Most believe there is a clear line between providing quality customer service and sales. They tend to believe their work is noble and that *salespeople* are a necessary evil.

Again, rubbish.

effort to uncover and then satisfy additional needs of its customers, leaves important money on the table from **sales not made**. These companies also risk handing their customers over to competitors that go beyond "thank you" and do provide great customer service by taking the extra step to uncover and satisfy additional needs.

Uncovering additional customer needs means to guide the customer, via the customer service function, into identifying needs they may not know they have, and then satisfying those needs with their company's goods and services. It is not, as many frontline customer service people believe, pushing customers into buying something they do not want or need. (See "The Three Sales Truths," *Central Iowa Business*, April '06).

My recent experience at a car shop illustrates how to sell via providing great customer service.

I needed an oil change, and I knew the service costs about the same anywhere you go, so I chose one shop simply because of its convenient location. During my visit, the mechanic asked me if it would be OK for him to look at my brakes while the car was up on the rack. I drive a big, heavy car and his request was reasonable, so I agreed. He returned in a few minutes with the bad, yet completely truthful, news that my front brakes were shot and just about to go steel to steel. He then suggested I have him fix them right away as

the car was already on the rack and it would only take a short while longer to complete the work. I knew that regular brake jobs are a lot like oil changes—competition is fierce (sound familiar?) and every shop charges about the same. So, I agreed to the additional work.

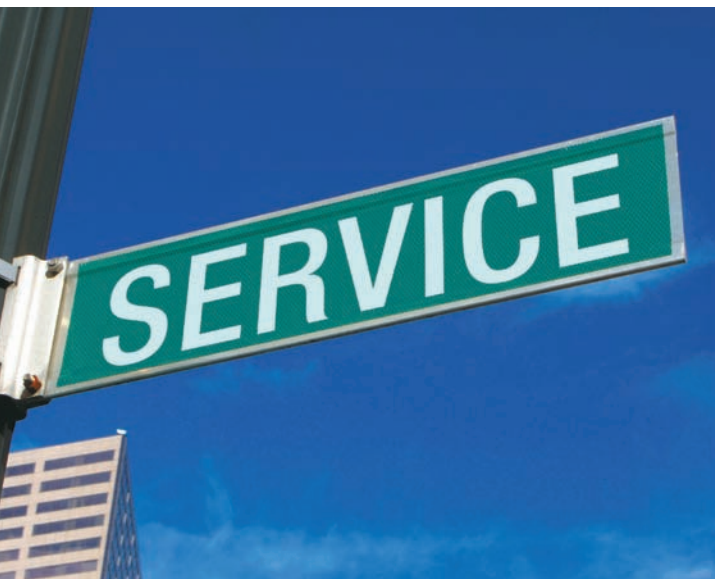
I spent about \$200 for a brake job and an oil change instead of spending about \$25 only for an oil change. I spent a lot more money than I had planned, but I was delighted to do so, because the company helped me *solve a problem I did not know I had*. The fact that the company *generated a lot more revenue* in the process was secondary. Had the mechanic simply changed my oil and said "thank you," my brakes would have gone out sometime down the road and I would have had a much more expensive and much less convenient problem (like being stuck on the side of the road) to solve at that time. The company *helped* me, and I returned to that car shop many times for work on my car as a result.

The question I pose to all customer service representatives after I tell them this story is: Was the mechanic a *salesman* because he *sold* me brakes?

They usually answer "yes" and I correct them with an emphatic *no*. He did not turn into a *salesman*. Not at all. He was a *mechanic* who gave me great customer service.

Think about your company. Do your frontline personnel believe customer service and sales are two separate and distinct activities? If so, then you are leaving important money on the table and your competitor has an opportunity to gain market share at your expense. ■

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With rising business costs and increasing competition for customers, companies can no longer afford employees who simply take orders and say "thank you" as the customer walks away or hangs up the phone. Every company, group or organization that does not make an extra