

The art of winning customers

Adapt from Sun Tzu's strategies and improve your relationships with clients

EVERY organisation in business today owes its existence to the customers that it serves.

It does not matter whether your customers are internal or external. What matters is the one thing in common they deserve — service. Good customer service sometimes goes unrecognised, but make one wrong move and the customer will remember your mistake for a long time and go on to tell others about it.

It is therefore vital for organisations to keep customers happy and to continue giving them better products and excellent service.

Organisations have to think of creative ways to maintain and improve their relationship with their customers.

Legendary Chinese general Sun Tzu's treatise, *The Art Of War*, may give you some creative ideas and insights to improve your relationship with your customers.

Here are four strategies from Sun Tzu's book that can help you develop excellent relationships with your customers. In the context of this article, view the customer as an "enemy" in the broadest sense — that is, as someone you have to "win over" and "subdue" to gain his loyalty.

Success in warfare is gained by carefully accommodating ourselves to the enemy's purpose.

In the context of customer service what this means is that as a service provider or manufacturer, you need to see how best you can accommodate your customer's requests.

There are many organisations that are bogged down with company policies that discourage staff from taking the initiative in serving their customers.

Wherever possible, you should satisfy your customers' needs even if it means bending the rules. If you are in a leadership position, this strategy suggests that you empower your staff to handle customers'



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needs and wants so long as they are reasonable and legal.

If the enemy leaves a door open, you must rush in.

Customers are sometimes unsure of what they really want. They are spoilt for choice because there are so many providers of the same service or manufacturers of the same product.

So, when a customer is looking for advice to help him make a purchase, you should move in quickly to promote your product or service. If you do this tactfully by finding out what his needs are and getting him to trust you, your customer might appreciate your effort and give you his business.

Unhappy is the fate of one who tries to win his battles and succeed in his attacks without cultivating the spirit of enterprise, for the result is a waste of time and general stagnation.

Some organisations have many effective policies and practices to keep their customers satisfied. However, what they may lack is the "spirit of enterprise", where they fail to review their products or services to see whether they are still relevant or beneficial to their customers. The American car manufacturing industry suffered in the early 1970s because they made cars without identifying their customers' needs.

The fact that oil prices were

slowly creeping upwards and people were generally looking for more fuel-efficient cars rather than big guzzlers escaped their attention.

The American car companies experienced stagnation and opened up opportunities for Japanese car manufacturers to make inroads into the industry with their smaller, fuel-efficient cars.

Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.

To retain customer loyalty, you need to come up with new products or services that keep pace with your customers' needs and wants.

Innovation is key, not just for new

products and services but also new ways to communicate with and engage old and new customers. For example, newsletters and advertisements may have worked in the past but nowadays, you also have to consider reaching out to your customer base through your corporate website, text messages, e-mail and social media like Facebook and Twitter.

Use the four strategies to help you think creatively about your customer relationship. Delight your customers and win the battle with your competition. - Source: ST/ANN

■ **ARTICLE by Daniel Theyagu, a seminar leader and training consultant with 20 years' experience.**