

“If You Ain’t Got No Cut Lemons.....”

By Judi Moreo

While hurrying off to work one morning, Beverly, an executive assistant, pulled into a fast food drive-thru. When asked what she wanted to order, she requested, “Iced tea with cut lemon.” The clerk replied immediately, “We ain’t got no cut lemons!” Shocked by such rudeness, Beverly asked politely, “Can you cut some?” The clerk’s abrasive reply was, “It’s not my job and the guy that does it ain’t in yet!”

In a recent customer satisfaction survey by the University of Michigan, two of the reasons cited for poor service were complacency and lack of training. For example: Let’s say that the reason the clerk was unable to give his customer cut lemons was because he was short staffed. In addition, the line at the drive-thru was quickly getting out of control and he knew he didn’t have time to cut lemons. Had he worked for a company who focused on providing a superior form of service and therefore ensured all employees had the right training, his more appropriate answer to Beverly might have been, *“I’m sorry for the inconvenience Miss. We’re out of lemons right now. It doesn’t happen very often and we do apologize.”*

If an employee doesn’t have the right skills to deliver customer service in an ordinary every day situation, you can imagine what will happen in the case of a difficult incident or an irate customer. The chances of resolving the situation and/or complaint will be near impossible.

In this global economy, customers are more savvy, more informed and have more choices than ever before. They will do business with the companies that give them better service. The competitive edge will ultimately go to the company with the highest level of service; one where service is almost an art form.

Companies that believe that customers are a “dime a dozen” in these prosperous times, very often make the mistake of believing their customers are expendable. If you lose one, there are many more! If and when times change, this complacency is going to backfire.

Curtis Nelson, President and Chief Executive of Carlson Hospitality Worldwide, parent corporation of a family of privately held companies that span several tourism sectors, addressed several hundred Carlson managers in an emotional keynote after September 11 saying, “The best customers are the ones that are value driven, not the ones that have no loyalty and will go to whoever is offering the lowest price.” He went on to say, “Building customer loyalty with superior service, not offering products at deep discounts, is what companies must do to win customers.”

There is not one company that can choose to ignore any possibility now or in the future of a downturn in the economy due to local or international factors. The key to winning customers will be to consistently deliver superior service. This ultimately translates into loyalty as a critical factor to retaining customers. When there are difficult times, companies who focus on satisfying customer needs, wants and expectations will be the ones who survive.

Remember, if you “ain’t got no cut lemons”, give them a serving of courtesy.

Judi Moreo is the President of Turning Point International, an international training and development company which specializes in the improvement of employee performance. The areas of focus are Service Excellence, Leadership, Creative Thinking, Communication, Negativity, Change & Transition. She is a co-author of “Conquer The Brain Drain: 52 Creative Ways To Pump Up Productivity” and “Ordinary Women ... Extraordinary Success”.