

Looking for Trouble

I'm sure you can easily remember being disappointed in a business transaction at some point -- the other party did a less than satisfactory job... maybe they were incompetent, non-trustworthy or perhaps even rude.

We've all had experiences like this, and if you're someone like me who doesn't often get rattled, perhaps you just "let it go" and walked away -- never bothering to let the offending party know how he or she didn't measure up to your expectations.

Then, because we all like to vent, you might have even shared your chagrin with your friends and associates, adding fuel to your annoyance and doing your best to hurt the villain's image and good will.

So did it ever occur to you that perhaps you're not all that perfect either?

That maybe at some point one of your customers who was less than thrilled just walked away without ever letting you know how or why you didn't measure up? And is now nursing a festering wound caused by your actions?

Of course you can't please everyone -- no one can. But too many displeased customers can quickly erode the world-class brand that you're trying so hard to build.

Looking for trouble can keep little problems from becoming big ones.

World-class companies know it's good policy to actually look for... and even solicit... problems from their customers.

Of course you know the airlines are always participating in those "how're we doing?" surveys and then using it in their advertising to tout their on time performance and customer satisfaction. Even old-fashioned companies used to have a suggestion box visible by the time clock.

Those surveys and suggestion boxes and "How's the service?" cards in a restaurant should be a model for you too. Does your business regularly poll its customers to look for issues?

We had an incident a while back where one manager suggested I was getting a bad rep at

his firm. "What's the problem?", I asked him curiously. "Oh, I'm just warning you and thought you'd like to know," was his reply. And he wouldn't elaborate on anything specific.

So what could I do to fix a problem I don't even know exists?

We designed a report card that I asked the client to distribute to all employees at the company who we deal with, giving them a chance to air their issues. I also gave them permission to say nice things too.

The purpose of the survey was threefold -- one, to take action about the manager's concerns; two- to fix little problems before they can become big ones; and three, to let everyone we deal with know we care about their happiness.

Curiously, we got no negative feedback and everyone who sent back a report card said they loved us. (Made me smile!)

I now use these report cards on an annual basis to poll for issues that can help us become a better and better company.

.....

Look for trouble before it can begin.

We're all looking for more business. We need new clients to grow. But maybe we shouldn't be so quick to take on every client who appears on our radar. Maybe we should be looking for trouble before it begins.

One of my fellow mastermind group members designed a wonderful rating scale he calls AART (Admiration, Affection, Respect, and Trust) that he uses to gauge prospective clients to see if they'd be a good fit.

He had over eight hundred customers in his client base before designing the AART scale. The results of his assessments helped him gain the courage to fire almost a third of his customers -- and getting rid of these under performers actually increased his profitability by over 40%!!!

He also employs assessment tools and tests for hiring staff, and keeps raising his standards of excellence.

Fewer and happier clients, happier employees, more money, and less hassles. Looking for trouble makes good business sense, doesn't it?

.....

What they're saying behind your back matters most for building your brand to future greatness.

The very best tool for growing your business into a world-class company is word-of-mouth "buzz" generated by your brand ambassadors.

Their delight in your performance is what will get them talking well about you. This powerful, unpaid workforce can influence others far better than any of your advertising or your sales force can.

On the other hand, get them warning others to stay away because their experience was bad can also be the quickest way to go out of business.

The fact is that you want to know what people are saying behind your back. You want to know what delights them so you can give them more of that. And you also want to hear their complaints so you can turn their issues into compliments.

.....

####

Allan Gorman is owner of Brandspa, llc - a Montclair, NJ based branding and creative consultancy Download a copy of Allan's informative and helpful report: "*Ten Marketing Secrets for Building a Sexier Brand*" from <http://www.brandspa-llc.com> or send an e-mail to agorman@brandspa.net

©2005 AGCD. All rights reserved.