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What's love got to do with it? (Customer service that is.)

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Now, let me be clear, when I talk about love, I don't mean the romance version of love. Webster's Online Dictionary includes one of its definitions of love as: unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another.

When you think of love in those terms, you can see that when it comes to sales and service, the answer to Tina Turner's question "What's love got to do with it?" is... EVERYTHING!

The Director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies, Dr. Paul J. Zak (nicknamed "Dr. Love"), says "Don't miss my point: love is not a squishy concept that gives us a warm, fuzzy feeling. Love is something revealed and expressed through actions. You experience love through what people do, not what they say. I love you when I care for you, even when caring is difficult. That is the experience I want when I fly or shop. I don't want empty, feel-good slogans. Don't tell me you value me. Show me the philia (love)."

Dr. Zak, though his studies, found that our brains release the chemical oxytocin when we feel love and trust. This chemical stimulates empathy and generosity, and helps tell us who to trust. Sounds exactly like what you want your customer to feel about doing business with you.

So how can you LOVE your way to success?

Love your employees. Businesses that have the best customer service are the ones that take a people-first approach. The thinking is that if you treat your employees well, they will treat your customers well.

The Container Store is a great example of this philosophy. During the recent economic downturn the company didn't lay off any of their employees. They did cut some benefits (that have since been restored), but everyone kept their job -- sharing the downside but preserving the whole. Now, that is LOVE!

This approach also consistently lands them on Fortune Magazine's "100 Best Places to Work" list year in and year out.

If you have ever flown, I'm sure you have experienced the opposite of this. When gate agents and flight attendants are treated badly by their company, they can get so frustrated and alienated that they wind up taking it out on their passengers.

If you manage a business ask yourself: "How can I show my employees that I love them?". And remember Dr. Zak's definition above.

Love your business and it's products and services. When you love the business you work for, it shows. You'll be able to talk enthusiastically about its qualities and become an engaged ambassador and promoter. This will lead to getting your customers to love your business too. Love is contagious.

How you truly feel will reveal itself -- good or bad. When you are passionate about your products and services, it helps your customers feel confident, and often they'll become passionate advocates too.

Love your customers. This one is essential. Can you serve people you don't love? Yes, of course. But can you give them the kind of service that gets them to tell their friends, family and colleagues about you without loving them? Not consistently, if ever.

How do you show your customers that you love them? Greet them promptly and warmly. Don't say "no" to them; instead tell them what you can do for them. Treat your customers as if they sign your paycheck... because they do!

Love yourself. Jeffrey Gitomer talks a lot about attitude. Your personal attitude is your key to success or failure. When you love yourself, you will take good care of yourself, eat well, exercise, get enough sleep and constantly seek ways to make yourself as good as you can be.

When you add love to your sales and service, you have the best ingredient for your success. More than that, an ecosystem of you, your business, employees, management, and your customers based on love is a foundation for everyone's success.

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