

Customer Service: A BSC's 'X Factor'



By Jim Peduto

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Some people have a knack for staying ahead of their competition. Others need to identify their "X factor" — that quality that allows them to outperform their competitors.

For building service contractors, the X factor is not a new, innovative cleaning process or technological wizardry. Operational excellence is merely a prerequisite for surviving in the cleaning business. To get ahead, BSCs must cultivate exceptional customer relationships.

Think about it: Your customer can always find dirt, but the strength of your relationship will determine their desire to find that dirt.

Relationships are built on expectations. The challenge is to manage each customer's expectations in a way that is both reasonable and healthy for everyone involved.

Many of my clients use this three-part test: Are expectations ...

1. Fair to the customer?
2. Fair to my employees?
3. Fair to my company?

If you answer "yes" to all three questions,

• **Offer convenience and options:** Every facility is different. Some facilities prefer day cleaning while others prefer night cleaning. Special events may call for cleaning-schedule changes and unique requests. Your customers will appreciate your accommodating attitude and remember it when referring new business or renewing their contracts.

• **Turn complaints into committed customers:** The best way to handle a complaint is look at it as an opportunity to impress the customer and occupants. For example, when a customer complains about lack of paper towels in the restrooms, do not just restock the supply. It may be an opportunity to introduce the customer to higher-capacity dispensers that improve service and make your job easier. The way you respond to negative feedback can make or break the relationship.

• **Treat customers and building occupants with courtesy and respect:** If you strive to be a successful business owner, act the part. Look customers in the eye, smile and maintain a professional attitude. Respect their time by scheduling meetings rather than dropping in on them.

• **Customers might not always be right, but they are always your customers:** If a customer complains and the complaint stems from an issue that is not your fault, take care of it anyway. It is always best to leave your personal feelings out of the equation and keep the customer happy by maintaining a professional approach.

The key to differentiating your business in a hyper-competitive market is the X factor — the exceptional way you treat your customers and build strong relationships. **CP**

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expectations are both reasonable and healthy. If not, the question you answered with "no" is the starting point for negotiations.

Merely meeting expectations, however, is not the basis for a great relationship. The key is exceeding them. Going above and beyond expectations does not necessarily require additional time and effort either. Consider these guidelines for exceptional customer service: