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Customer Service: Learn What to Listen For

This article was written by Tom Egelhoff

Every business I know is always on the lookout for ways to improve customer service. Our local Chamber of Commerce Business Support Committee recently did a survey of local businesses asking what types of training seminars they would like to see. The overwhelming response was for Customer Service. Most business owners will tell you that providing friendly courteous service is paramount. What they sometimes forget is the importance of really listening for certain phrases the customer might use in the initial contact with your business.

Greg Erickson of Specialized Automotive keeps a list of 22 specific phrases by each phone that his employees will answer: Here they are:

- My car is at another shop.....
- I've been to other shops.....
- I've been ripped off before....
- I have the parts.....
- Do you think they're charging too much?
- I don't trust them
- All shops try to cheat you
- Can't you get a used one?
- That can't be the problem.
- My father told me.....
- Another mechanic said.....
- I can get it for less at.....
- I don't think I really need that.
- I brought my son along.....
- You should have known that
- You should have fixed that last time
- I was insulted by.....
- I was offended by.....
- They caused me to.....
- They made me.....
- I hate.....
- I'm so angry at.....

What Greg is looking for is a clue that the potential customer has had an unpleasant experience at some other repair shop. When a customer mentions one of the "key phrases" it alerts the employee that this customer needs extra special treatment. The customer has probably been "burned" with a large bill for work that was not done correctly.

This creates a great opportunity to convert this customer to a loyal and good P.R. person for your business. Take care of them and you can count on referrals for years to come.

At your next company meeting, compile a list of phrases that your customers sometimes use that will alert you that they are looking for a company to right a wrong done to them by a competitor. Go over them with every employee and convert competitive customers to your customers.