

Welcoming Customer Feedback

What do you do when you hear a discouraging word about your store, or even worse, get a letter from an irate customer? Do you cringe, delegate the problem to someone else to handle, or ignore it completely? Actually, you should welcome criticism. It means the person cares enough about your business to tell you about a problem or incident they had in your store. If they didn't care, they'd just tell everyone else about the problem instead of you and not come back.

It is hard to take criticism and handle it objectively. I have found it is much easier to deal with through e-mail. You can erase something you type that sounds too brash after you read it and before you hit "Send," whereas you can't take back anything you say in person.

Recently, we had a customer who was unhappy with the way she thought we treated her and sent me an e-mail to tell me about it. She said we had lost her as a customer and she wanted us to know why. We had offered her a buyout and she had accepted it. Later, she thought about it and was unhappy. She had been a consignor in the past so expected more than we pay on buyout. Unfortunately, she perceived that the salesperson had pushed her into it. When I discussed it with the employee, she said the lady never showed being upset at the time. Through e-mail, I was able to relate to the customer the differences between buyout and consignment. We ended up having e-conversations over the next three days but came to an amicable agreement for both of us. She decided that she will consign with us in the future and thanked me for listening to her.

Five ways to use customer feedback to better your business:

- Believe that customers have good ideas.
- Gather customer feedback at every opportunity.
- Focus on continuous improvement.
- Share customer feedback throughout your organization.
- Use feedback to make changes quickly.

Some critical feedback turns out to be a misunderstanding, but often a customer will give you an idea on how to fix something that is not working well. Try looking at a situation from their point of view and see what can be done about it. The most important thing that can come from critical feedback is that you learn from your mistakes and do something about it. Whenever a problem person comes your way say, "Here comes another opportunity" and welcome them.



—Kitty Boyce
NARTS Vice-President
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Kitty Boyce, NARTS Vice President, owns The Kids Closet in Rochester, IL. Kitty has been in business for fourteen years and her store is the largest children's resale store in Illinois.