

Making a Connection vs. Being Efficient

written by Lori Jo Vest

I'm almost embarrassed to admit that I've been to Starbucks three times in the last three days. My husband and I are coffee addicts and we love the Starbucks dark blends. When you buy their coffee at the grocery store, the bag has a coupon for a small (aka "tall") coffee at Starbucks, so fortunately, we're not spending as much cash as we could be.

On our first visit this past week, we used the drive-through and I decided to pull out all the Starbucks gift cards I'd gotten and see what might be left on them to pay for our drinks. The young woman at the window was smiley and patient, as I handed her four cards and asked her to check the balances and apply them, one-by-one, to the total. She even went as far as to write the remaining balance totals on the front of the last two cards before she handed them to me.

"How nice was that?" I asked my son as we drove away. "She just made my life a little easier by doing that." I left the store with a very positive feeling toward Starbucks.

The next morning, when I returned to the same store with my husband, I handed the two gift cards with the balances written on them to the young woman behind the counter. "Hey, weren't you here yesterday?" she laughed. "I remember you!" I thanked her again for taking time to write the totals on the cards. This Starbucks staffer was engaging and friendly, making eye contact with me as she thanked me for coming by. Again, I left the store with a positive feeling. I'm not a brand fanatic, but based on this and other positive experiences at this location, we often drive a mile past another coffee shop – two miles out of our way – to visit this particular Starbucks.

This morning, my husband and I stopped by for a quick cup to take with us to the grocery store. Same store, different employee. This time, the woman who waited on us was multitasking. She asked us what we would like, poured the two cups and told me our total as she set them down on the counter. Very efficient. Then, while I got my money out of my wallet, she walked away to put away some items that were on the counter. No conversation, no smile and no eye contact. She came back a few seconds later, took my money, said thank you, then immediately turned away to go back to what she had been doing before we walked in.

This time, I left with a neutral feeling. No smile or conversation = no attempt at connection and a neutral feeling. This exchange didn't create a negative feeling, though a few more visits like that one and we may be less likely to drive the extra two miles to get there.

The last experience reminded me of one of my favorite businesses in the professional growth category, Give More Media, a company founded by a guy named Sam Parker. Their website says that the company is "a group of people passionately committed to making work better. We do it by creating and publishing tools, information and material that help people get more

meaning from their work.” Their “Smile & Move” products are designed to encourage “mattering to the world, all with a smile.” I recently listened to one of Sam’s webinars and his advice for keeping employees in a positive, service-oriented mindset is to “reinforce, reinforce, reinforce.” Managers must constantly and consistently reinforce the behavior they want to see from their staff members.

How can you reinforce exceptional service from your staff members? Here are some tips that will help:

Have morning or pre-shift huddles. At least once a week, ask each employee to share an example of how they or one of their coworkers created a stronger connection with a customer or a way they made someone’s life easier.

Use a bulletin board. Post motivational quotes, customer thank you notes and other positive messages. Rotate responsibility for the bulletin board each week to encourage employees to submit quotes and other materials for display.

Create an employee rewards program to recognize those that go above-and-beyond in service. This can be as simple as allowing employees to nominate each other for great service moments, then randomly picking one entry per week for a small prize, like a gift card or a preferred parking space.

What do you think? What can you do to reinforce stellar service this week?

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Co-author of the customer service bestseller, “Who’s your Gladys? How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan,” Lori Jo Vest has been involved in relationship-based sales and customer service for over 20 years. She has developed extensive marketing, sales and customer service expertise through her work in business-to-business sales and marketing positions. She consults with mid-sized and second stage businesses on methods to enhance their sales and customer service efforts through one-on-one awareness campaigns, methods for developing personal connection and custom strategies for long-term relationship building. You can reach Lori at lori@lorijovest.com.

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