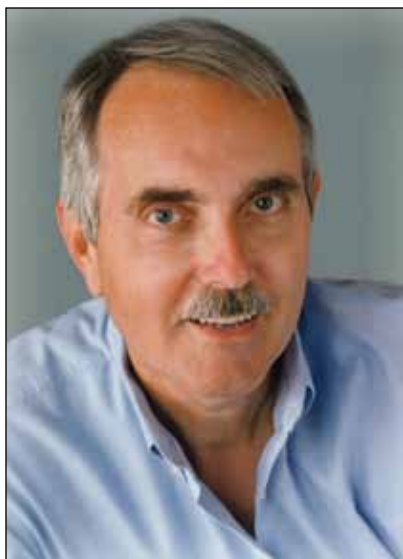


Making the Customer Connection

By T. Scott Gross



T. Scott Gross knows service. He lives it—eats, breathes, and sleeps it. With Positively Outrageous Service, Gross has struck a chord with people who share his passion for ‘loving on’ customers. Gross is one of America’s top motivational speakers, and humor is at the center of his presentations. He will be the SSA Foundation Forum speaker at the Spring Conference & Trade Show in Charlotte, North Carolina on April 5. He is the author of Positively Outrageous Service, 2nd Edition (Dearborn, 2004). Visit his website at tscottgross.com.

There were more than a dozen sitting around the conference table watching a high energy marketing representative unveil next year’s plan. It was awful; not awful in the sense that the materials weren’t well done or that there weren’t enough of them; not awful in the sense that the slogan wasn’t catchy or the coupons would be difficult to handle.

It was awful because it gave away the store. It was awful because it was more of the same discounting that has nearly ruined the pizza industry.

Let’s see a show of hands, please. How many of you know anyone who pays full retail for pizza? See! Only those who have so much money or so little sense that the price is academic. The rest of the world buys pizza with coupons. Pizza is probably the world’s best, or poorest, example of over-discounting.

“Here’s a novel idea,” I suggested. “Why not an ad campaign that talks about our great products and simply wonderful service? We could give our customers a reason for coming in besides a give-away deal!”

“That sounds great in theory. But in the real world, I have strong competition on both sides of me, less than a few blocks away. I have to discount.” (That was from an operator whose sales were flat and promised to take a turn for the worse.)

I was reminded of the old joke when the guy says, “I lose a little on every sale but I make up for it in volume!”

My wife and best friend, Melanie, looked uncomfortable. On the way home she said, “Discounts. That’s all we hear is discounts. I wanted to ask what they were doing to establish a personal relationship with their customers!”

And I couldn’t help but imagine other meetings being held in other parts of the city. I imagined that in those meetings, franchisees for other chains were also too frightened of the competition to say “no” to discounting.

How to Establish a Personal Relationship with Your Customers

My wife was right on target. Establishing a personal relationship is the very hallmark of the hospitality industry. It is the one advantage that independents have over the chains. Too bad so many independents fail to capitalize on this important competitive edge.

“I’m so glad your food is good,” said a lady with a face I didn’t recognize as belonging to one of our regular customers.

“I’m glad, too,” I smiled. “But we sort of expect our food to be good!”

“Me, too,” she said. “It’s just that even if your food wasn’t so good, I would buy from you anyway because of all the good things you do in the community.”

We follow a few simple rules for loving on our customers. Our customers love us in return and support us with or without coupons.

Eight Rules for Strong Public Relations

1. *Remember the customer even when they are not buying.* If you don’t see a regular for awhile, do you call to find out if everything is okay? We do!
2. *Support causes the customer holds important.* There are dozens, maybe hundreds of charities that you could support. Almost all of them are worthy. But since it is physically and financially impossible to support every one, why not find out which causes your customers care about most and support those?
3. *Give something free of cost and occasion.* Once in a while, give the customer something “just because.” If you need an official excuse, create a holiday.

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SELF STORAGE 101:

finish the statement by choosing the best answer.

1. I want to...

- (A)** put my favorite attorney on speed dial.
- (B)** continue losing money.
- (C)** pretend that America does not watch Reality TV.
- (D)** register with StorageTreasures.com.

Answer:

D: Register with StorageTreasures.com to increase revenue and reduce liability, while standardizing the self storage auction process.

To find out more, visit StorageTreasures.com



Excerpt, from page 20

We were dining at the Peach Tree Tea Room this past Valentine Day when the owner stopped at every table and presented each lady with a beautiful carnation. It didn't cost much but the thought alone made the occasion special. Several days later, we had a houseful of unexpected out-of-town guests. Where do you think we took them for brunch? All for the price of a carnation!)

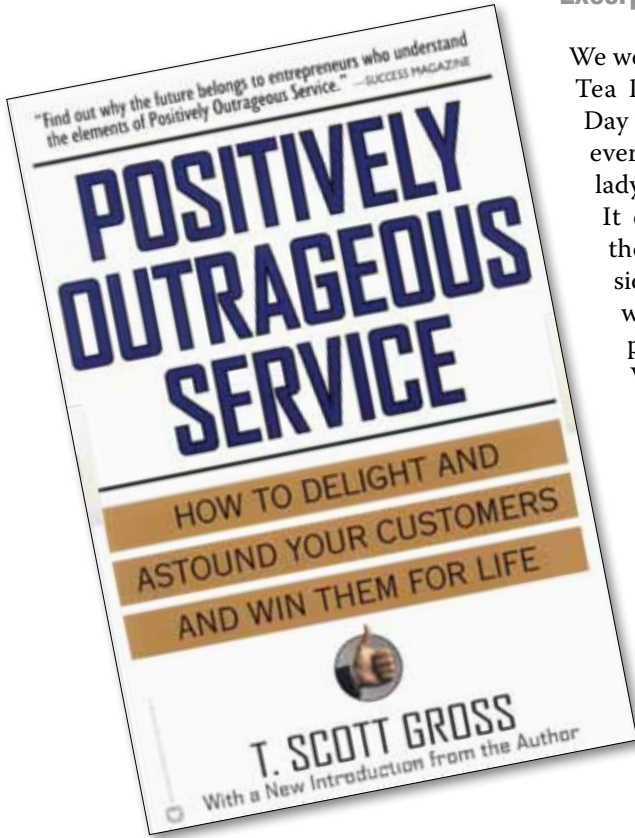
4. *Be a product and service fanatic.* A friend of mine tells a story about dining at a new restaurant. She says the service was excellent but the food, although tasty, was stone cold! The waitress was distracted by

a large party and, not wanting to hold up the others at her table, my friend continued with the meal. When the waitress checked back and discovered the problem, she alerted the manager who promptly visited the table and offered to replace the meal. Wrong! He should have insisted on replacing the meal and removing it from the check. Instead he put the decision on the back of the customer.

A product and service fanatic comes "unglued" when things aren't perfect. Customers see that and develop confidence that management puts customers ahead of profits.

5. *Demonstrate that customers are first by respecting their time.* If you must make customers wait at least act concerned. When you value a customer's time, you value the customer as a human being. Do everything you can to make the wait shorter or at least seem shorter by

See Excerpt, page 24



FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE

GET 12 FREE LOCKS WHEN YOU BUY 60!

That's right! Buy a case of any of these disk locks at the sale price and get 12 more locks FREE!

Choose from any of our popular styles. We'll invoice for 60 locks and send 12 more along at no additional charge.

Retail Value
\$19.99



DK-6 "The Dimple Key"
Buy 60 locks for \$824.40 and Get an additional 12 FREE Locks



S770R-LAI "The LAI Premium"
Buy 60 locks for \$440.64 and Get an additional 12 FREE Locks

Retail Value
\$13.99

Single Champion or "Mr. Lock"
Buy 60 Champion or "Mr. Lock" locks for \$287.28 and Get an additional 12 FREE Locks

Retail Value
\$10.99



"The Champion" Twin Pack
Buy 60 Twin Packs for \$574.56 and Get an additional 12 FREE Twin Packs

Retail Value
\$19.99!



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