



## COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS IN THIS CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE

**Is** there a more effective way of communicating with customers in this economic climate?

**How** can you as a business hold the balance between optimism and realism in this current economic market?

**Is** there a way to hold the hope for your customer base?

**Yes there is!** The first step is to simply listen to what your customer or client is saying to you. When people feel really heard, the need to keep pushing their opinion forward diminishes. They don't need to persist in their viewpoint if they realise you genuinely understood their concerns the first time.

Regardless of what they are saying to you - if you are actively listening to your customer, they will immediately pick up on your interest and that may help diffuse any angst they are feeling. As a brief overview - genuine active listening simply involves maintaining eye contact, using open facial expressions and nodding when appropriate. This way you are giving them the gift of being fully present.

You then have a choice about what you do next, but whichever option you go for empathy must be present. You can actively reflect back what they are saying to you, or you can gently proffer your own opinion as long as it is not too negative! You are in no position to change the economy but you are in a position to be positive as opposed to negative in your responses to your customer base.

Replying in a positive sense can be as simple as acknowledging what the client has said to you and then offering a comment like, 'Well, they are saying it won't go on forever', or 'Apparently it will never be as bad as the great depression of the 1930's.' Both of which are true! Remember people are looking for answers and some sort of hope – and this (rightly or wrongly) may well be directed to you at your place of work.

So, what do you do now you are aware of this? You carry on doing your job positively and with a smile on your face. Make sure your comments (though realistic), are upbeat. If you can be supportive to your customers, and show interest in them, they may be reassured that your company will continue to provide the service/product it does - in years to come - you may have even given them some hope! Hope costs nothing and can be a powerful feeling to have! You haven't promised the economy will magically right itself, but you may have engendered the feeling that, things could turn out to be okay!

One thing that is surfacing at the moment is the public's willingness to buy into the doom and gloom.

This certainly contributes to the feelings of panic and helplessness individuals are feeling. You do not have to buy into this; in fact the opposite is true. Be empathic, supportive and then offer some positive comment to the situation.

Why? Because your client can leave feeling a little more hopeful and positive than when they arrived. Conversely if you engage with how bad it is, you run the risk of them leaving your workplace feeling slightly worse than when they arrived. They certainly won't be feeling overly optimistic about you. Never underestimate how people's feelings firstly, affect what they think - and secondly, how this reflects in their subsequent discussions with others.

If however, you notice that whatever you say and however you act, this customer or that particular group of customers, just wants to focus on the direness of the economic climate, and how prolonged it is. That's okay – that is their need at the moment. You can engage with them without becoming negative yourself. You can simply empathise and then change the subject. Begin to talk about a different aspect of their lives - as people love nothing more than to talk about themselves in some way or another. You can ask them open ended questions like – 'So how are you finding the new job?' or 'How is your son doing now?' By doing this you begin to diffuse the negativity that was growing!

Keep in mind, if you have given hope, however small to someone that will certainly have an impact on whether or not they remember you, discuss you or even stay loyal to you – through their ongoing custom and provision of your products and/or services. It can have a domino effect.

So begin today to:

- Actively listen – by holding eye contact and using open facial expressions.
- Be empathic – show genuine interest in the customer.
- Reflect back – give comments that show you have heard their opinion.
- Be positive – stay realistic but err on the side of positivity.
- Don't engage in negative responses – this can bring people down.
- Give hope – simply through being optimistic

People need to feel valued and important whether economic times are good, bad or indifferent! You can do this by maintaining a viewpoint that you can do something as opposed to you can't! Even if it is as simple as smiling and offering an encouraging word.

Try today to engage a typically negative customer positively and notice the response. If it is not what you hoped for - try again with the next one. You will have an impact; you just may not see it yet! Be aware you can never change someone's mindset – if they are determined to be negative and pessimistic, that is okay – just try to remain calm and focused on what you are doing – providing the best frontline service you can.

Before too long, customers will be drawn to you, and remember the old saying

**'There is no greater referral than word of mouth!'**

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