



BY RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

Becoming Better..

...everyday, in every way, a dose at a time

*Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are nationally recognized experts on customer service, customer retention strategies, “messing with the media,” and everything retail. They share their real-world ideas with audiences in their critically acclaimed “Retail Adventures in the REAL World™” keynotes and seminars. Visit their web site at www.kizerandbender.com, and watch for more Retail Adventures™ in upcoming issues of **Craftrends**. Contact them by email at kizernbndr@aol.com*

Every retailer, large or small, needs a game plan that defines who you are, where you’re going, and how you plan to get there. To be truly successful, these strategies must be built upon what your customers say is important to them.

We began researching customers 11 years ago. Since then we’ve watched, followed, and spoken with thousands of customers, and we’ve learned the things good stores do to keep customers close.

Our secret weapon is a simple question you should ask your own customers. We call it “The BIG Question”: “What one thing could we do to make your shopping experience in our store more enjoyable?”

Look at whatever they tell you – good or bad – as an opportunity. Write down everything they say, even the small stuff. Ask the BIG Question for a period of six weeks, then take the things you heard the most and become a Change Manager.

In your new role, you’re going to have to make some changes; some big and some not so big, and you’ve got to be committed. If you feel overwhelmed, don’t stress out – make your changes a dose at a time.

Choose one or two things at a time, then move on to the next two on your list. You’ll be amazed at how quickly positive changes will take place. Customers will take notice and reward your efforts with their loyalty.

Now, we don’t want you to have to wait six weeks to begin your new job as change manager, so here is a one-dose-at-a-time strategy you can implement at the same time you are asking customers the BIG Question.

RECAPTURING LOST CUSTOMERS. We all have customers that were once customers, but left for any number of reasons. Or maybe they just haven’t been in for a long time. These customers are business just waiting to happen, and they’ll be impressed you’re

making a sincere attempt to recapture their business.

- Begin by listing the 10 most-important customers lost in the past year, then write each one’s name on a separate sheet of paper.

- Under each customer’s name, write down the reasons you think they left. Then ask your staff why they think you lost that particular customer, and add their comments to your list. The goal is to use this information to create a tailored plan of action to resurrect each lost customer.

- Even a change manager needs help, so assign the job of reconnecting with each of the lost customers to members of your staff. Make sure they receive a copy of the tailored plan of action you’ve created to use when working with these customers.

- Each plan needs to deal with the customer’s past and present needs and concerns. We call this stage of reconnection “Customer Courting.” Be patient – it might take time for lost customers to renew their relationship with your store. You’re going to have to “romance” them, but once they see you are truly dedicated to their needs, you stand a good chance of recapturing their business – and their future loyalty.

Too many retailers think because they own the store, they have all the answers. Not true! Customers today are smarter and more demanding. If you take time to interact with them on a daily basis, you’ll reap the benefits of their wisdom.

The danger, however, lies in asking customers for ideas and not doing anything with what they say. People will only offer help if they see their suggestions implemented. If you ask for help and never make changes, you’re history. Give customers what they want, and they’ll be willing partners in your continued success. ♦