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Six business lessons from an air conditioning guy

By Donald Cooper

Since the weatherman promised an extraordinarily hot July and August this year (so far he's been dead wrong), we decided to have central air conditioning installed at our country home in Muskoka.

We contacted one of the local "expert" mechanical contractors who promptly informed us that our furnace was not designed to accept air conditioning and would have to be completely replaced at great expense. Apparently, our plenum is too short.

So, we called another contractor, **Mid-North Mechanical in Orillia, Ontario**, who came to check out our "short plenum" problem and they assured us that, while our plenum is short, there's an excellent unit specially designed for such a situation and he could install it in a week.

He also noticed that our humidifier is an old and inefficient model and that all of our air management controls were amateurishly and inconveniently located under the cottage. He suggested fixing all of that while they were doing the air conditioning and, of course, I agreed. His quote arrived by email first thing next morning and an appointment was made for 9 AM Thursday to do the work.

At 9:05 on Thursday morning the phone rang. It was Diane from Mid-North's office calling to say that the crew was running about 15 minutes late but they were on their way. Now, I've built, repaired or renovated no fewer than 9 residences in my convoluted life and, although trades people have shown up late (sometimes days late) hundreds of times, I've never received a call like this. My Lord, somebody finally "gets it". Somebody understands what it's like to be a customer and has the courtesy, professionalism and good manners to proactively communicate.

The crew arrived 10 minutes later, as advised, did their work in one day and, are you ready for this, they cleaned up after themselves before leaving. Most contractors will show up a week late, never call, leave a mess behind...and think that's all OK.

The following day the cheerful Diane lady called again to say that she was completing the paperwork for the equipment Warrantee on our behalf and just needed our Postal Code. She said that she keeps records of all Warrantees in her files so there's no problem if we misplace our copy.

Wayne, their Sales Manager is coming by tomorrow to show us how to operate and maintain the system to achieve optimum comfort and energy efficiency...and to show us how to cover and protect the exterior part of the system for the winter months.

So, let's look at the six powerful business lessons here for all of us to learn from...

1) First, they had superior **product knowledge** that allowed them to do what their competitor said couldn't be done. So, they got the business...and we saved \$5000.

Do you know 'stuff', or have 'stuff' that your competitors don't? Are you the real expert? Are you the 'go to' people for the difficult jobs, challenging assignments or extraordinary products...or are you simply mediocre?

2) They also **knew and cared enough** to suggest how they could improve the equipment that we already had. They got the add-on sale and I no longer have to go outside into a basement crawl space to change furnace or humidifier settings. All controls are now neatly and conveniently located on the living room wall, where they should have been in the first place.

Are you always looking for additional ways to be helpful, to make life easier for your customers, to build a trusting relationship and to make the add-on sale?

3) They **did what they said they would do, when they said they'd do it and they communicated** as soon as there was even a slight 'burp' in their promised service delivery.

Do you do what you say you're going to do...and do you have the good manners, professionalism and courage to proactively communicate when there's a problem or delay of any kind?

4) They proactively **looked after the fiddly paperwork** and they have a **back-up system** to ensure that we're properly looked after in the future.

Do you go out of your way to take care of the little details that your customers don't want to, or don't know how to do? Do you look after them now and in the future? This creates customer "ownership".

5) They will **coach us on how to be successful** with what they've sold us.

Are you committed to being the 'caring coach'? Do you help your customers to wisely choose and effectively use what you sell? Do you help them to get the most value and enjoyment from doing business with you?

6) And, finally, do you do all of this with **joy and grace**? Whatever you sell, people come to you for that, plus JOY. You are in the "joy" business...but you can't deliver joy if you have none yourself. Do you truly love what you do, who you do it for...and who you do it with?

So, honestly, how do you stack up? Are you as good at what you do as Mid-North Mechanical is at what they do? If a heating and air conditioning contractor in Orillia, Ontario can be extraordinary, what's holding you back? Go over the six points above one more time and for each point make notes about something that you commit to do to be extraordinary.

Note: © 2009 Donald Cooper, MBA, HoF, is a Toronto-based international business speaker and coach. He helps business owners and managers to rethink, refocus and reenergize their business to create compelling customer value and long-term profitability. Donald can be reached at 416-252-3704...or by email at donald@donaldcooper.com.

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