

How Well Do Your Customers Know YOU?

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Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, asked himself this important question several decades ago. His answer: employee nametags. So, he rolled out an initiative that required all of his employees to wear badges, the purpose of which was to help the customers get to know the people they bought from.

But helping customers get to know you isn't just about names, it's about information. In other words, it's about self-disclosure, which is the process of revealing your personal information to another.

This process starts with a small piece of information, i.e., your name. Then, as the relationship develops, it progresses into more intimate territory with the sharing of opinions, preferences and experiences. What's more, because of its reciprocal nature, self-disclosure has incredible power. It creates comfort, establishes rapport, helps discover the CPI (Common Point of Interest) and builds trust between you and your customers.

I once worked at a mom-and-pop furniture store in Portland, Oregon. More so than any business I've ever walked into, the owners of City Liquidators leveraged self-disclosure to its fullest extent. You couldn't step five feet into their store without seeing pictures of their family. The walls donned clippings from nostalgic newspaper articles and various personal memorabilia that brought the store to life!

As a result, shoppers who walked in the door felt like they personally knew the owners. Engaging conversations about children, families and growing up in Portland were frequent among the customers. And, the emotional connection sparked by these interactions helped the customers feel more comfortable while shopping which ultimately secured their loyalty.

Not to mention, self-disclosure actually helps YOU get to know your customers better as well! Here's another example. My friend Dennis is a doorman at the Ritz Carlton. He is a master of using self-disclosure to establish relationships with guests.

If a family with young children pulls into the front drive, Dennis always gets excited. (He has a young daughter himself.) And as soon as he extends his warm welcome to the arriving guests, he doesn't hesitate to share information about his own family. Sometimes he'll even show guests a picture! But Dennis knows that an effective way to learn about his customers is to educate them about himself first.

How well do your customers know you? Here are some ways you can use self-disclosure to create comfort and build rapport with buyers:

What's Your Story?

How did you get your start in business? Did you fall into your line of work? Perhaps there's an interesting anecdote or event that caused the birth of your business. If so, this is called Your Story, and it's a fundamental tool for helping your customers get to know you.

Write it out. Practice saying it aloud. Make it funny. And tell it to everybody. Publish it on your marketing materials, and especially your website. Create a special page on your website called Our Story, or My Philosophy that shares this personal anecdote.

On my website you can even watch a

<http://www.hellomynameisscott.com/?toInc=video.php>>video

of my story!

Start Blogging A popular new medium through which to share your feelings, experiences and emotions is with a blog. I recently started [HELLO](http://www.hellomynameisblog.com), my name is Blog for my business, and it's become a valuable tool to stimulate personal dialogue with potential customers. A blog is an online journal on which you can post comments, links, stories and articles. A blog is free and easy, and also a great way to let your customers know what's going on in your life. And the best part about it is: they can post their comments too! Talk about self-disclosure!

For more information go to www.blogger.com; or do a search for any of the various blog providers in Google.

Recommend Resources

In your newsletter, on the phone or in person, recommend books, CD's and other resources. Tell your customers how much these things have changed your life, your business and your relationships. If they take your advice, they'll be more inclined to share their own experiences with you, not to mention you'll soon have more things in common!

My friend Ed who works for Cornerstone Financial does this all the time. He spends a few hundred dollars a year buying copies of his favorite books for his customers. He tells them how the books improved his life in the hopes that his customers will reciprocate their similar experiences which they do.

Your ability to educate your customers not only about your products and services, but about yourself, is critical to your success. If you follow these principles of self-disclosure and reciprocation, your customers will get to know you better than ever before! So, remember what my friend Jeffrey Gitomer says: it's not what you know; it's not WHO you know it's who knows YOU.