

Keeping Customers Happy Is Good for Business

by Diana Hanson

If all things are equal between two bids, potential customers will choose the builder that makes them feel good. Now, you and I know that all things are rarely equal, but the differences we see aren't always clear to customers. So, it makes sense for you to use all your assets to make the sale, including those manners you learned as a child. Smile, show your concern for your clients' comfort, and express your hope that they will enjoy the outdoor living space you are crafting for them. Inspire their trust and open up the lines of communication.

Creating that trust and making it easy for your customers to communicate with you increases the likelihood that they will go ahead and purchase a couple of extras, too, like post-cap lights, for example — maybe even before or during construction, rather than at the end when what could have been a simple change becomes a more involved and expensive retrofit.

First Meeting

Let the clients do the talking and they will think you are brilliant. Be their "deck counselor" and listen carefully to what they say. You might have to ask a couple of questions to get the conversation moving, like "What kind of entertaining do you plan on doing on your deck?" or "How do you think you will place seating or a grill on your deck?"

Then, give them feedback on their answers, adding your observations

and ideas. Getting them talking and exploring possibilities with you will speed up the design process.

Delivering the Bid

Show a little spit and polish by using a presentation folder. These are inexpensive and can be purchased at any office supply store. You can include a cover sheet that provides information about you — how long you've been in business, any specialties you have — and a picture of one of your stunning showcase decks.

Making the Sale

Be sure to thank customers for hiring you as their builder. Acknowledge that they have a lot of other builders to choose from, and that you appreciate their confidence in you. This "thank you" is a courtesy that gets the customers firmly on your side. It's one of the first things that will get them telling friends and neighbors about you, your work, and how well you treated them.

Just Before the Build

Ask customers where they would prefer materials be dropped and make sure the driver has those instructions. Nothing will wreck your clients' day — and yours — like a pile of materials dropped directly in front of their driveway. If you can be there for delivery, all the better. Your customers will appreciate that you're managing the job with their comfort and convenience in mind.

Every Day

Keep materials stacked neatly. Put tools away and clean up at the end of the day. Homeowners don't want to come home after work and see a messy construction site in their backyard. A neat site boosts your clients' confidence in you, as they see that you are being considerate of them and conscientious about your work.

During the Build

Stop hammering and help your customers smell the roses. Point out special features and ask if they have questions.

One good time to do this is upon completion of the framing. Point out details like extra support for a planned hot tub or outdoor kitchen. Explaining a little about how the structure works will help them appreciate the value of what they are paying for and reassure them of the quality of your work.

Having an open dialog with your customers will also help you to catch any mistakes or misunderstandings. We all know that it is easier to fix or change something earlier rather than later. Without a dialog going, your customers may wait until the job is done before bringing anything up — even if early on they think something is wrong. It is essential to keep the lines of communication open.

Final Walk-Through

Take your customers on a tour of their new deck and go over the

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features they asked for. Show pride in special touches and show your customers that you are pleased with how it came together. That will help them continue to have confidence in their purchase. Your goal should be to leave your customers bursting with excitement over their deck and needing to tell their friends and neighbors all about you and your work.

Goodbye

Giving customers something small to thank them for their business is a great way to get more business (see *Deck Ledger*, “Win Referrals With Parting Gifts,” January/February 2007, also available free online at deckmagazine.com). It’s even better if the gift has your logo on it.

A few suggestions are a grill mat, an ice bucket, a towel rack (if there

is a hot tub), or even just a couple of coffee mugs (remember to include your logo!). If your customers have a fire pit or a barbeque, you might give them a good lighter, some special seasonings, or grill tools. Whatever you decide will be a nice touch, and it will be another great thing the customers will be able to say about you.

Help your customers be pleased with their decision to hire you and happy with their purchase, and they will definitely spread the word about how terrific you are. And if they want a deck on their next house or decide to add on, you’re the one they are going to call. ♦

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