

Forming customer Loyalty

By Steve Bludsworth, All-Pool Service & Supply Inc.

In these tough economic times, what will keep your current customers loyal to you? What will keep them from jumping ship to a less expensive and unskilled pool service company? That could be the million dollar question for a number of service companies, but many have overcome price versus professionalism issues in the past. Now may be the best time for you to “upgrade” your professional approach to your customer’s backyard and not lose this account to the “one polers” and “cleaning crews.”

Analyze how the firms you deal with retain your important and valued business. Do they call frequently asking about the quality of their service? Do they provide neat and legible reports of what they’ve done for you? How are they dressed when on your property?

Schedule some time (about five minutes or so) with your customers at their backyard pool or spa. Rearrange your schedule to service the pool when they are home and then work and “interview” at the same time. Wear a CLEAN, tucked in shirt (bring a spare company shirt to change into before seeing your customer), brush your hair and find a breath mint as well. Don’t chew gum during this trip.

Before asking any questions, thank them for the *privilege* of doing this important work for them. A valued and loyal customer is going to tell others about your GREAT service. Ask about the use of their pool during the season; do they entertain or have lots of kid’s parties. Leave a new business card (or several) that lists the best way of getting in contact with you if they need to. Reconnect. Let your customer see who they are paying for the work.

Now is the time to plant the seed that you know more than just how to use a test kit or fill out a “was here” door hanger. Mention one of the industry happenings regarding energy efficient equipment, safety upgrades (drain covers) or just the latest in water chemistry (salt or ozone based systems). Do you have a manufacturer’s flyer you can leave with them to review? You are suggestive selling and at the same time providing the latest information about new products for their pool. You may not offer these products, but you may be able to network with someone who does. This type of symbiotic relationship can give you extra money if there is a referral program and extra area leads when the firm is looking to recommend a quality, licensed, trained and insured pool service company.

Be careful when talking about anything that could be considered a negative; gas prices, food prices, material costs, etc. They are probably facing these issues just as much as you are. Do not bring these issues up as a way of introducing a price hike in your fees.

Thank the customer again for their loyalty and business. Close by saying, "I am here to make your pool or spa a safe and enjoyable part of your home. As a member of a state-wide industry trade association, I pride myself on staying up to date on the latest trends, equipment and regulations. Let me know if you ever have any questions I can help answer." Sure it may be corny but it is more effective and professional than, "Yeah, have a nice day."