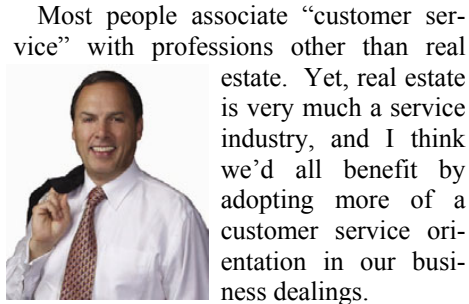


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Customer Service — A New Focus Among Savvy Agents

By **JIM SMITH, Realtor®**



Most people associate “customer service” with professions other than real estate. Yet, real estate is very much a service industry, and I think we’d all benefit by adopting more of a customer service orientation in our business dealings.

Personally, I’m what’s referred to in the industry as a “farming” agent. That is, I “farm” a particular subdivision (the Village of Mountain Ridge in north Golden), and by “planting seeds” of goodwill, I hope to “harvest” listings over time.

I made a faster start than most new listing agents for a variety of reasons that I don’t mind sharing with my colleagues and potential (or actual) competitors, and customer service was a big component.

For example, my “farm” newsletters have never been primarily about real estate, but rather about topics which have real interest to the homeowners. I’m not talking about how to winterize your home, or other purchased editorial fluff. Instead, a typical newsletter features an article introducing new homeowners (if they want to be introduced), regardless of whether they purchased one of my listings. Where did they move from and why? What do they each do for a living? What are their children’s names and ages? Any pets (with names)? Anything they’d

like their neighbors to know about them?

My training as a newspaperman (at the Washington Post and owning several community newspapers thereafter) helps me to write these and other articles. Increasingly, I send my newsletter by email instead of in printed form, but, whichever version I send, it downplays real estate. If I have a new listing, I hopefully remember to mention it briefly and give a link to that listing’s website and its virtual tour.

As a result, I have 250 email addresses in a subdivision with 296 homes and I don’t recall the last time anyone clicked the “unsubscribe” link at the bottom of my email. Another indicator is the number of hits my listing websites and their virtual tours get from this low-key mention of them in my emails — my most recent listing got 170 hits, and its virtual tour got over 40 hits within a day or so of sending that email. This is a typical hit count and I attribute it to making my newsletters interesting for their non-real estate content.

Regarding that old Realtor standby, the neighborhood garage sale, I looked for a way to “raise the bar.” Now, instead of merely getting people to participate and then putting up the signs, I invite each participant to email me their list of items or categories of items that they will be selling, and I share that list with the entire neighborhood a few days before the garage sale, giving everyone an early shot at the items that particularly interest them.

Other Examples of Customer Service in the Domain of Real Estate

1. Free Moving Truck.

Leasing this truck has enabled me to provide customer service on several levels—not just to my clients but to potential clients, too. I use it to pick up unsold items after each garage sale and take them to the Habitat Outlet and/or Goodwill. Anyone in my “farm” can borrow the truck for any purpose, whether or not they’re a “client.”



2. Virtual Garage Sales. One of my clients was down sizing and moving out of state. Since there was no garage sale coming up, I

created a slide show of all her items (with prices) using my virtual tour software and sent the link to my email list. Everything sold!

3. Public Meetings on Key Topics.

When tax valuations jumped in 2003, I hosted a public meeting at the Golden Library at which a Deputy Assessor answered questions. I handed out customized spreadsheets to each of the 30-plus homeowners who attended to help them determine if they had a basis for appeal. When the neighborhood’s aging wood shake roofs became an issue for homeowners, I hosted a meeting on that topic.



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