Survive Thrive or Dive

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Chapter 16

Evaluating the Value-Added

There is a growing sense of malcontent amongst customers and employees alike with respect to how they feel they're treated in our Western business model. As previously mentioned, customers too often feel that they merely represent a notch in the gun belts of slick sales reps who are more intent on gaining a commission rather than a customer. On the employee side of the coin, workforces often complain that they are overworked, underpaid, underappreciated and just overall, undervalued. When our customers and co-workers both feel undervalued, it's only a matter of time before we lose them to competitors who are prepared to *"put their money where their mouth is"* when it comes to demonstrating value for people.

In the previous five chapters, our focus has been on ways to help you create meaningful relationships with your customers as well as your co-workers. The premise is that the predictable human nature response to any efforts directed at showing value for people, will result in value to the bottom line. Of course, any efforts to create value over and above the normal standard of whatever your competition is doing, is going to require an investment. To create value, the decision that business owners and managers have to make must be based on evaluating the potential return-on-investment with respect to allocating finances and resources to train your employees to better serve your customer base. Yet there is still one last piece of the customer service puzzle we have to examine. We need to look at *extra* ways that are out of the *ordinary* by which we can tangibly demonstrate to our customers that they are valued in addition to supplying superior customer service. This *extra-ordinary* effort towards creating stronger relationships has been defined as "value-added" service, and it is one of the least recognized and least utlilized strategic areas for creating a company that thrives.

Psychology has long espoused that the secret to creating (and maintaining) strong relationships requires a purposeful attempt to demonstrate the core-values of recognition, appreciation and affirmation. Part of creating a mission statement or visioning statement, is to communicate to all members of the company the *who, what, when, where* and *why* of focusing on the customer as a person, not just as an account number. Presumably, after having created a mission statement and an accompanying vision statement which the entire company will follow and fulfill, you are going to want to publicize your corporate values so your customers can see how committed you are to their well-being.

Once you do that, you are going to be held accountable to that which you profess to be responsible for. In other words, having publicized your mission statement and company vision, your customers, suppliers and employees will expect the company's leadership to be committed to making good on these statements. To ensure that you don't fall down or end up with egg on your face, the proverbial wisdom is:

Under promise – over deliver

If you don't deliver, then there's another proverbial piece of wisdom that goes like this:

Money talks and BS walks

These caveats simply mean that *your customers are watching*. And so is your competition. If you launch a local, regional, or national advertising campaign which boasts that your company will go the extra mile in comparison to whatever the competition is doing, words are only worth the paper they're printed on. The proof is in execution. Just as the admonishment in ***Chapter 13*** about profit sharing cautioned "If you say it, pay it" the corollary admonition was "Let your yes be yes and your no be no – or else you'll be condemned." Condemnation means to be found guilty, and in this case, you will be found guilty of hypocrisy. The condemnation won't just be limited to the ranks of your customers, suppliers and employees. You can bet that the biggest charges of hypocrisy will come from your competition.

Let me give you an example of a promotional campaign launched by a national hotel chain which in spite of sounding great on paper, failed miserably in terms of execution. Not surpisingly, the chain dropped its self-aggrandizing claim of value-added customer service as soon as its patrons started complaining that these boasts were nothing short of BS. Recalling we have just learned that *money talks and BS walks*, customers did walk – straight to the competition. I can personally attest to how miserably this particular campaign failed because I had first hand experience with just how badly this hotel chain missed the boat when it comes to understanding the concept that value-added customer service means you *under promise – over deliver*. Instead, the campaign fell flat on its face because the hotel's employees were more motivated in saving face, than facing up to their responsibilities. Rather than being focused on the customer they were focused on themselves, proving (in my case at least) that their only commitment was to *over promise – under deliver*.

For a number of years I served on the Board of Regional Directors for one of the world's largest healthcare organizations. Every summer we would hold our Annual General Meeting at some major metropolitan city, whereby tens of thousands of our delegates would fill every available hotel within 2.7 light years of the convention center we were meeting at. As all these conference attendees converged on the city, the organization's Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, VIP's as well as several hundred constituent representatives (and their families) would typically fill one particular host hotel right in the heart of the action.

Conventions are a bonanza for these host hotels. Not only do they sell out all their rooms, they also sell out every conceivable square foot of meeting rooms. They also get to provide riduculous amounts of catering resulting in dumb, stupid amounts of profits for the hotel because in the convention industry, catering is where the real money is. But as much as being the host for a large convention is like winning the lottery, in the long-term big picture it's a double-edged sword. Treat the delegates well and the return-on-investment can provide dividends that last for years. Treat them poorly, and it's game over for any future business.

One particular year the host hotel that won the lottery from this particular healthcare organization boasted that if *anything* was unacceptable, for *any* reason, the hotel would credit you a night's stay. This slogan was plastered on posters, placards and paraphernalia in every conceivable visible location. It was all over the lobby, the reception desk, the elevators and of course, prominently positioned on the pillows. The presumable function of this boast was to prove, tangibly, that this national hotel chain was more committed than their competition in providing superior customer service. Specifically, this boast was presumably aimed at assuring business travelers that by staying there, the experience would be worry-free. Furthermore, this promise of extraordinary customer satisfaction had a guarantee that, in the event that the "inconceivable" happened and there *was* a problem, that the hotel staff were more than ready to fix it, and they would do so hassle-free. The hotel was "putting their money where their mouth was" by guaranteeing its patrons a free night's stay for any valid inconvenience. It was a brilliant promise.

The upside of such a promise was that, should you stay at this hotel and everything went well, you would likely come to the reasonable conclusion that it was safe to plan future trips with this national chain, because they obviously took customer satisfaction to a higher level than the competition. In the event that something *did* screw up, the hotel was undoubtedly hoping that by crediting you with a night's stay, you would forgive their oversight or incompetence and feel so good about getting a free night's stay that you would give them another shot at a future date. In the hotel industry, the name of the game for securing business travelers is to get them in the habit of booking with you. If a hotel chain can successfully do that, then business travelers will instruct their secretaries to simply default to booking them with the same national chain for whatever cities they visit while on business, and will conceivably patronize these same hotels when on vacation.

So it was a brilliant promise. Unless…

Unless they failed to deliver. Which is exactly what happened to myself and another delegate who was the president of his state constituency. Neither of us received the wake-up calls we had ordered, so both of us were late for our meetings. Now you have to understand, the organization was spending millions of dollars to ensure that each of the official delegates were able to easily congregate in a central location for the purpose of attending caucus meetings, policy meetings, and of course, the political meetings for the house of delegates whereby leaders would be either voted in or voted out of high ranking offices. We were expected to be on time. That's why all those millions of dollars were spent.

Yet two of us did not receive wake-up calls.

Coincidentally, we both found ourselves at the front desk lodging the same complaint at the exact same time. The hotel's response? A young junior reception clerk insisted they simply "couldn't" have made such a mistake. Really? Then why did two individual people both have the same complaint (and perhaps others as well, who just didn't happen to be at the front desk at the same time we were). My colleague asked to speak to this young lady's superior, so onto the scene came a slightly older but still fresh-faced young man with the title "Assistant Manager" on his name badge. We explained the nature of our complaint, at which point the young man unequivocally supported the position of his junior clerk and insisted that what we were both complaining about couldn't possibly have happened.

At which point my colleague looked this young man straight in the eye and with what I'll admit was an icy edge in his voice, said *"So if I'm not mistaken, you're accusing both of us of lying!"*. This is the double-edged sword I alluded to earlier. By choosing to *validate* his coworker, the assistant manager was simultaneously choosing to *invalidate* his clients. Even worse, he was choosing to question the integrity of, not just us, but that of our entire organization. Not exactly razor-sharp thinking. Now the issue became, how would this assistant manager 'manage' to extract himself from a precarious position? As a consequence of my colleague's icy comment, the assistant manager was now treading on very thin ice.

Here's why:

By supporting his junior co-worker without first attempting to look into the problem, the assistant manager was telegraphing to two clients that they had to be wrong because the hotel didn't make these kind of errors. This was his first mistake. Mistake #2 was to infer that both of us were lying. Mistake #3 was to be oblivious to our conference name badges which signified we were dignitaries of the organization that had rented out their entire hotel. Mistake #4 was not considering that, as dignitaries, we would have input in the decision making process for future conventions.

We asked to see the hotel manager on duty. This took some time, but we were both a little hot under the collar and weren't about to back down after the way the junior employees had been treating us. We fully expected that when the hotel manager showed up a saner, more mature head would prevail.

We were wrong.

The hotel manager sided with his junior employees. He didn't look into the problem, he simply reiterated the hotel's commitment to customer service, blindly stating that under no circumstances could the hotel staff manage to ignore not one, but two requests for a wake-up call. Instead, he insinuated that both of us must have slept in. By attempting to *validate* the infallibility of the hotel, he effectively *invalidated* the value of his customers' complaints. By invalidating his customers, he simultaneously invalidated the integrity of the hotel chain's promise to deliver superior customer service. In fact, he accomplished the opposite. The bad PR that resulted from the actions of all three of these hotel representatives not only nullified any potential gain from their promotional slogan, it backfired in the minds of myself, my colleague, and every other person cueing in line at the reception desk. It would have been better if the company didn't have any promise or guarantee at all, because rather than fulfilling the concept that good customer service means that you *under promise and over deliver*, the manager made the cardinal mistake of *over promising and under delivering*.

At this point, I felt it was time to make a point. I pointed to the poster in the lobby bragging about their commitment to customer satisfaction. I pointed to the placard propped up beside our elbows on the reception desk, then pointed to the banner behind that front desk. I pointedly reminded the hotel manager that their customer satisfaction guarantee was that if for *whatever reason* a patron was dissatisfied with some area of customer service, that they would be credited with a night's stay. So I held the hotel manager accountable to this guarantee by demanding he make an adjustment to my account. My colleague said to count him in as well. What we couldn't have counted on, was the manager's response.

He said *"No"*.

To make a long story shorter, we ultimately got the credit the hotel slogan promised. It took a bit of energy, emotion and effort on our part, but we were fired up on principle. You need to bear in mind, a free night's stay was of no personal benefit to either of us as our hotel bills were being paid by the organization. We stuck it through because, in our minds, we were being treated like trash that was headed for the dumpster; the hotel manager may well have been justifying in his mind that he didn't need to address the problem because, like the trash, we would be gone the next day. What none of the hotel representatives were considering was what the ripple effects of this blatant hypocrisy would cost the hotel in future dealings. To my knowledge, the organization has never patronized the hotel chain since. Furthermore, whenever I do a lecture on customer service, I show a slide of the placard left on my pillow which prominently boasted of what, in my experience,was a non-valid promise to ensure hassle-free customer satisfaction.

The slide also prominently displays the name of the hotel chain.

So let's talk about *validating* our customers. Let's talk about looking at client relations from the perspective of validating the publicly stated belief that our customers are valuable. Psychologically speaking, any platitudes we espouse about how we value our customers will fall on deaf ears, if we don't step up to the plate and take action. Customers will merely think *"They're all talk, but no action."*

Customer-focused mottos like *"You're #1 in Our Books"* and *"We Do It All For You"* or else *"With Us, You're a Somebody"* are meaningless logos words if the mottos aren't backed up by some qualitative and quantitative measures of service. Worse, if we go about plastering such slogans in our lobbies, our business cards and invoices without having a solid track record of actually putting energy, emotion and effort into making good on our promises, our reputation will quickly dive.

Recall the math from ***Chapter 11***, where we learned that it costs 900% more to create a *new* client relationship than it does to maintain an *existing* one. If our philosophy towards customer service does not include an action plan that validates our customers, then predictably our customers may feel that they are merely an account number to us, who's only function is to increase our profit margins. The simple psychological and sociological truism is that *everyone* wants to feel that they bring value to the table in *any* form of relationship, and that includes corporate relationships between buyers and sellers. If we are on the receiving end of a business transaction and only take from the person who is giving, without making some purposeful efforts to "give back" in some meaningful manner, then when others "give" and we "take" the *predictable* human nature response for those doing the giving is to feel "taken advantaged of".

This sense of one party doing all the giving while another party does all the taking doesn't have to be confined to customer/client relationships. When we think of business relationships we need to be thinking holistically. We also need to be thinking outside-the-box. The common (but misguided) mindset in today's business model is that we only invest into the relationships where people pay us for our services. We need to ask "who" are the people who bring value to our businesses and we can't confine that thinking to just our customer/client relationships. Aren't relationships with our suppliers just as important as relationships with our customers? How about considering the importance of any individual or any corporate entity who acts as a referral source and sends us new business?

If we don't demonstrate any meaningful gesture of appreciation to those who help us be successful in business, then whomever is helping us could very reasonably feel underappreciated. Psychologically, the deeper thinking behind the principle that relationships are give and take, is that whoever does more of the *giving* is ultimately going to feel like they're been *taken*. For those interested in gaining a competitive advantage, I'm going to recommend you shift from the common mindset of *give and take*, to a more outside-the box thinking of *give and give*.

Think about it. There's no such thing as give and take, just as there's no such thing as 50/50. I'll prove it to you.

Have you ever heard of a relationship where two parties both *unanimously* agree (with no hint of resentment) that both of them give equally to the relationship? You haven't, have you? Maybe you've seen a couple where the man says that, while the woman rolls her eyes, or else the woman says it and then elbows her man in the ribs and says "Isn't that right, honey?" to which the man moans his affirmation. In reality, there is no such thing as 50/50 because one party always feels they are giving more than the other. As soon as that happens, by definition, one party becomes more the giver and one party becomes more the taker. So here's an *IC moment.* If you don't want those who create value for your business to ever feel *taken* advantage of or *taken* for granted, then delete the word *take* from your vocabulary. This new mindset goes like this:

There's no such thing as 50/50 and no such thing as give and take.

There's either give and give.

Or take and take.

I'll give you two examples of how you can provide value-added appreciation to a relationship where you are the paying customer. If you have a company that keeps fixing your flats for free like Kal Tire, when they fix your flat and provide a free wheel alignment to boot, why not show them some gesture of appreciation like giving them a box of donuts? I realize that you are the paying customer who gives them money when you buy tires, but this is why "give and give" is so outside the box. Sure, nothing says you *have* to give any anything extra, but *that's* the joy of giving. If you're not sure if the boys in the mechanic bays will appreciate this relationship-building expression of thanks, just wait until the next time you need service and don't be surprised if the manager says *"No need to leave the vehicle here. I'll get you some coffee and the guys will have that flat fixed before your cup is empty."*

A second example would be your favourite (non drive-thru) restaurant. If there's one particular restaurant you like to patronize because the kitchen pursues excellence like Chef Ramsay, then why not show appreciation where warranted? All you have to do is ask the head waiter for permission to stick your head in the kitchen to say thanks to the culinary crew. In my experience, I have never been refused. Better yet, give a tip to the chef and his comrades, not just the servers. It doesn't matter if they pool tips, the outside-the-box application of adding value to your relationship with the restaurant, is that nobody ever tips the kitchen. So you will, and you'll be remembered for it.

It's even more important to think outside-the-box in terms of showing appreciation to those who refer us clients. These people should be thought of as unpaid advertising agents, who at least need to be "paid" some respect. We need to value them by *valuing* them. The risk is, if those referring business to us do all the *giving*, while we do all the *taking*, then the predictable human nature response is that sooner or later our referral sources may feel *taken for granted* to the point that they may "take" their referrals elsewhere and "give" them to someone else, where someone else is anyone else that validates the referral source (giver) by "giving back" via some meaningful gesture of appreciation, recognition, and affirmation.

Psychologically speaking, the term we need to learn is *invalidation.* It means a lack of feeling valued in the eyes of any person who contributes to a relationship without sensing an equitable degree of reciprocation. If we don't show any quantitative measure of value for those who help make us successful, there's no reason for them to continue to be in a relationship with us, whether it's between a husband/wife, a customer/sales agent, or a referral/provider. In marital relationships this is the seed of dissatisfaction that leads one to believe that the grass is greener someplace else. In the business realm, this is especially true (and especially dangerous to our bottom line) if we provide a service *that is essentially no different from that of our competitors*. Without placing some tangible, quantitative value on our customer relations, it puts us in a place of liability. All it will take is for some competitor to show how they will add greater value to their customer relations than what we show, and our customers will be swept off their feet.

Right into the eager arms of our competition.

We lose, while our competition wins. Our profits go down, while our competition's profits go up. We are one step closer to diving, while our competition is one step closer to thriving. The question we all have to ask ourselves is, if our customer relations are really as valuable as we like to boast, then what are we doing to back up the boasting? The bigger question is, are business owners prepared to put their money where their mouth is, when it comes to putting true value into validating business relationships?

Apparently not. At least, not from my consulting experience.

Let me give you a few examples.

Much of my consulting over the past seventeen years has been with my colleagues in the healthcare field, so let me give you a medical example of what it looks like to ignore the value of those who help you be successful. Imagine you are some sort of specialist, say a cosmetic surgeon, an ophthalmologist who performs laser eye surgery, or an orthodontist. You receive referrals from general practitioners who don't have the training to perform the treatment their patients need.

Not only do they send their patients to you, they also extol your virtues, your skill and maybe even your compassionate bedside manner. In short, the referring GP's pave the way for these patients to arrive at your office having already formed a bond of faith and trust with you, based solely on their existing relationship with their GP. Not surprisingly, when you as the medical specialist present your treatment plan for that referred patient (and the associated cost which can easily be five thousand dollars or more) the patient quickly agrees and consents to move forward with a "buying" decision. In a very real sense, they've already been "presold" on the value of your services by the referring doctor. Understanding that these kinds of specialists make dumb stupid amounts of money, you might wonder what they do to validate their referring GP's in the realms of recognition, appreciation and affirmation for the value their referrals bring to the bottom line of the specialist's practice.

In my experience, the answer is next to nothing.

When I say that the extent to which specialists validate the "value" of the GP's who make them successful is "next to nothing" that might even be a little generous, unless of course, you think receiving a greeting card at Christmas time qualifies as some extraordinary "value-added" gesture of appreciation. What's ironic is that these cards are stereotypically imprinted with the same message, namely,

"At this festive season, we wanted to tell you how much we appreciated all your referrals during the past year. Happy Holidays!"

So what's the extent of their recognition, appreciation and affirmation?

A greeting card.

Which in the minds of most recipients, is next to nothing.

At least, that's the sentiment I've heard from the hundreds of general practitioners I've taught for almost twenty years. So let's evaluate the "value-added" for a minute. Irrespective of whatever industry you're in, if you were sending somebody a hundred thousand dollars (or more) in referrals every year, how would you feel if the only "thanks" you got was a greeting card? You'd probably share the same sentiment as all those hundreds of GP's. Not exactly "meaningful" and not a whole heck of a lot of "value". It's about seventy-five cents worth (let's not forget the postage). Yet over the past twenty years, the idea of a specialist sending a bulk mailing of greeting cards once a year still seems to be the industry standard.

If we were to evaluate the value-added, we'd come to the conclusion that if this is the extent of a specialist's attempts to make an impression with their referral source, they must be overwhelmed with referrals. Otherwise they might be wise to calculate what the return on investment might be if they were to demonstrate some tangible measure of recognition, appreciation and affirmation of how valuable a referring GP is to their practice. By not validating the value, another proverbial piece of wisdom comes into play, namely:

Whatever you don't value – you lose

Except it would be foolish to suggest that any specialist wouldn't think of the referrals from GP's as not being valued (or at least, valuable). The point to ponder is, does the referring GP *feel* valued? Because as we've been examining in the last fifteen chapters, it's all about people and when dealing with people, it's all about relationships.

The fact is, most specialists are always on the lookout for additional referral sources, because referral sources are revenue sources. Specialists rely on the referrals of GP's and because of this, they are constantly spending thousands of dollars with printing companies to send out packages of referral cards to every general practitioner in their geographic area, in the slim hope that these GP's somehow don't have anyone else to refer to, and will somehow entrust their patients to some specialist whom they have never heard of, and who hasn't established any degree of relationship with the

GP's their mailouts hope to solicit. The only winners in this kind of situation are the printing companies who produce the referral cards, and the post office.

As previously mentioned, the extent of what most specialists typically *will* do in the realm of attempting some value-added gesture, is to send a holiday greeting card to all their referring GP's during the Christmas season. These cards are all too often mass printed, including digital signatures of the specialists and their staff. Not exactly what you might call the "personal touch". The ironic thing is, the general practitioners *also* receive cards from *other* specialists who (presumably) are hoping to make an impression (by virtue of sending these cards) to GP's they don't even know. What's even *more* ironic, is that the GP's receive *the exact same cards*, because all medical professionals buy these cards in bulk from the same suppliers. The bottom line is, irrespective of whether a GP on the receiving end of this "value-added" gesture is sending the specialist hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of referrals a year or is sending diddly squat, they're going to receive the same cards.

Talk about a prescription for invalidation.

While the aforementioned is epidemic amongst medical professionals, I should point out that some specialists are a little more business savvy. They send a box of chocolates. But like the holiday greeting cards, they buy these boxes of chocolates from the same suppliers who typically telemarket the specialists offices every October. And every October, a certain percentage of specialists buy (in bulk) the same boxes of discounted chocolates to send to each of their referring GP's. Which means that for the first two weeks every December, general practitioners receive identical boxes of chocolates in such quantity that they could open a retail outlet. Sure, a box of chocolates might be "better" than a mass-produced card, but when you receive the *same* gift or the *same* card ten or twenty times, you have to wonder how much "thought" went into this supposed token of appreciation. What makes this demonstration of "value-added" even more absurd, is that chocolates are not something that is necessarily going to excite a forty or fifty-something professional that is overstressed and probably overweight with high blood pressure. So why do the specialists send chocolates?

The specialists I've consulted with tell me that they've been convinced that by sending chocolates, this will make a "big impression" with the female nurses and receptionists. Sure, it might make an impression with *them* (as rumor has it that all women like chocolate) but how are chocolates supposed to validate the relationship with the referring GP? It's not the nurses and clinical assistants who make the referrals, it's the *doctors!*

Once again, talk about a prescription for invalidation!

The same can be said of other fields of industry where suppliers send their customers bottles (or in some cases, *cases*) of alcohol. Like the overstressed, overweight doctor who doesn't need chocolates, what if the recipient of this "value-added" gesture is on the verge of a drinking problem, or worse, is a recovering alcoholic? Rumor has it that running a business is "stressful" and everyone knows that alchohol abuse is most prevalent with those who seek alchohol as an escape from stress and pressure.

The automotive supply industry is equally famous for its habit of sending calendars of scantily clad females draped over classic automobiles during the holiday season. How much of an impression is *this* going to make when the wife of the boss shows up to drop off her car for servicing and sees this soft porn adorning the office walls alongside the pictures of her children's baseball team? Is this the kind of impression she wants her son (or daughter!) to see when they visit Dad at the office? Besides the mental, emotional and spiritually damaging mixed message this would send to the wife as to how much the business owner husband values, appreciates and affirms his bride, if those sending these calendars think the wife of a business owner doesn't have influence over what the company does and who they buy their supplies from, they've obviously slept through the social and cultural revolution of the 60's and 70's and are still living in some retro-mentality of the 1950's.

When you start to look closer at evaluating the value-added, you will quickly come to the painfully obvious conclusion that there are a lot of ineffective (if not in some cases, downright dumb) strategies for what is supposed to be an attempt to add "value" to business relationships. Some are socially insensitive, others are sincere but merely misguided, while other still are simply inappropriate. The purpose of value-added is exactly what the term infers – to add value to the client relationship, in much the same way that the focus of providing superior customer service, is to be superior to your competition. Yes, I will readily admit that these are kind of "duh" statements, but whenever I have been asked to be a speaker on the psychology and sociology of customer service at tradeshows or national conventions and I've asked the room full of delegates:

"Are you committed to superior customer service?"

There is always a forest of hands that immediately raise to signify that the vast majority of attendees are prepared to publicly acknowledge in the eyes of their peers that, *why yes of course* they are committed to "superior" customer service.

My follow up question then becomes:

"For those of you who raised their hands, how many of you can itemize the things you do, that your competition doesn't do, to enhance your reputation as a company which values its customers more than your competition?"

At this point, almost all the hands go down. The same holds when I ask an audience:

"How many of you strategically invest in value-added customer service?"

When hands go shooting up like dandelions in the spring time, I get the audience to *evaluate the value added* of their strategic efforts by asking:

"How much would 'you' value whatever it is that you send out, to whomever it is you profess to value, if you were the recipient rather than being the sender?"

At this point in their self-evaluation process, most people begin to evaluate their shoelaces. It's the same thing that happens when I ask conference attendees to stand if their company has a mission statement. As you'll recall from ***Chapter 8***, the follow-up question is:

"If you can recite your Mission Statement, please remain standing."

It all boils down to this. Customer service can't be a philosophy, it has to be a battle plan. You don't go into battle unarmed and you don't send an army into battle without provisions. You have to invest into developing a customer service strategy, then you have to invest further to empower your representatives with the resources and finances to fulfill the battle strategy. As it relates to value-added tokens of appreciation, find out what your clients are interested in, and then fulfill a need.

It looks like this.

If an automotive service client has pictures of his kid's baseball team on the wall, then the wise investment would be to send them tickets to take their son and daughter (and wife) on a family outing to a ball game. If a client proudly displays a fourth place trophy from some corporate best-ball on his bookshelf, then the smart money would be invested to invite him out for a game of golf and (if it's not too obvious) to let him win. In the event that they're a terrible golfer such that letting them win would be an obvious attempt at pandering to their ego, but it's just as obvious that they love the game, send them a gift certificate for a few lessons with your favorite teaching professional. Just be sensitive enough to send a card along with gift certicates *(personally signed, let's not make the same mistake as the medical specialists)* to admit that this pro helped you when your game was mired in the sand traps.

If all you're doing in the realms of customer service is the same thing everyone else is doing and you're finding yourself frustrated because of the lack of effectiveness of your efforts, the phrase you need to bear in mind is this:

If you always do, what you've always done,
you'll always get, what you've always got

Value-added is an investment, and the return on investment is determined by the universal laws of cause and effect. You reap what you sow. Invest nothing, and that's how much your client, supplier or referral source will feel you value them. Send something cheap, and you'll be thought of as being cheap. Do the same thing that everyone else is doing, and you'll make no greater impression than anyone else.

If you aren't doing something extra outside the ordinary, you aren't extraordinary. You aren't providing anything "superior" in the realm of customer service and therefore you don't have any competitive advantage. It's the same principle of cause and effect we introduced back in ***Chapter 12*** for those employees who are dissatisfied with whatever their daily provisions are, and thereby want to see more "bread". The math is simple; they're going to have to do something "extra" on top of the "ordinary".

Like any meaningful relationship, if you're not doing anything for the person who adds value to your life, the predictable risk you take in the realms of human nature is the rule of "or else". Without that person feeling validated by some demonstrable gesture of recognition, appreciation and affirmation, they reasonably start looking *"else" where* to get their self-esteem needs met by *someone "else"*. Relationships in business are no different, because you're still dealing with people and all people will universally respond to the laws governing human nature, including the law of cause and effect. The formula to remember is that it costs 900% more to create a new relationship than it does to maintain an existing one. If you're not extending any efforts to those who are critical to your success other than the ordinary, then you're going to have to *add* something to create more *value* in their minds, because the risk is, whatever you don't value, you lose.

It's called *value-added* customer service, and as obvious as it sounds, the premise is to provide something in addition to what your competition is doing and something that you can reasonably predict your customer will value.

Otherwise, it's not value-added.