

Customers are smart. They know exactly what we're thinking, because our actions send clear messages every day.

1. We don't care what you think.

Customers get this message when no manager is visible. They understand that their opinions are worthless when they complain and no changes result.

Ideas: Implement a customer advisory board. Use focus groups to get feedback on a specific problem. Have your managers mingling with customers, not stuck in an office all day.

2. We don't want your money.

Forcing customers to make a special telephone call during limited hours to update credit card data is a great way to tell them that you don't really want their money. Demanding ID from longstanding customers is another way to make sure they get the wrong message.

Ideas: Use your billing software to remind customers about credit card expiration dates. Provide multiple ways to update account information. Train your front-desk staff to handle updates. Provide online updates. Note accounts with good pay-

ment histories and treat them accordingly.

3. We're more important than you are.

Customers can tell that they are nothing more than a necessary evil when your employees talk to each other while the customer waits for service.

Ideas: Train your staff and split phone coverage so that people serving customers in your store don't have to interrupt transactions to answer the phone. Teach them that personal conversations are a no-no while they're assisting customers. Staff properly, so that employees have the time to focus on each customer.

4. We don't want your business.

Limited store hours which are convenient for you—but not for your customers—make it clear that serving customers well is a low priority. Poor parking arrangements also tell customers that their convenience is unimportant.

Ideas: Extend store

hours to cover the hours when your customers *aren't* at work—evenings and weekends, for example. Allow them to place orders online, by fax, by email, and by telephone. Provide convenient, well-lit parking. If possible, reserve parking for your store's customers.

What Are You Telling Your Customers?

1. We don't care what you think.
2. We don't want your money.
3. We're more important than you are.
4. We don't want your business.
5. Our priorities are more important than yours.
6. We're not paying attention to our business.
7. We like new customers more than we like you.

5. Our priorities are more important than yours.

Overselling memberships and other products tells customers that it's more important to get cash right now than it is to build a trusted long-term relationship. Making boilerplate recommendations to clients without regard to their specific goals is another good way to let them know that you couldn't be bothered to make it more personal.

Ideas: Whether you're selling supplements, offering rehab services, or running a weight management program, focus first on the customer's needs. Doing the right thing for the customer builds healthy businesses.

6. We're not paying attention to our business.

Customers conclude that you're overlooking the details when you don't clean up empty boxes and trash, when aisles are cluttered, and equipment isn't working.

Ideas: This one's simple. Take care of the little stuff. For example, if you have a "Manager of the Day" sign, always post a name. Never leave it blank. Do you want your customers to conclude no one's in charge?

7. We like new customers more than we like you.

Existing customers notice when you treat new customers better than you treat them — for example, spiffing up your décor and offering customer discounts in January to catch the post-holiday exercise crowd.

Ideas: Create loyalty programs and frequent shopper programs that reward your best customers. Surprise them with a coupon for a free or discounted service while you run your new member promotion. Strive to improve your products and services year-round.

The Radial Group provides business management expertise to the wellness industry via consulting and workshops. Contact us at 214-651-8155 or visit www.radialgroup.com.