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# Shaking hands with the customer

Unless you're a sole proprietor, every day your employees interact directly or "shake hands" with customers. The quality of those interactions provides first impressions, reaffirms or refutes existing opinions, and basically builds your organization's reputation.

A few years ago, Janet and I were in the market for a new vehicle. We narrowed the make down to two manufacturers due to prior positive experiences with each. Since we had a slight bias for Brand A, Janet called the local dealership and set up an appointment.

When we arrived, we were informed that Joe Salesman was late back from lunch, so Ryan Rookie, the newest member of the staff, would help us get started. Young Mr. Rookie did an admirable job of helping us, admitting when he didn't know the answer to a question but promising to get us an answer.

Twenty minutes or so into our episode, Mr. Salesman moseyed along and promptly "rescued" us, excusing Mr. Rookie. Obviously



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the expert, Mr. Salesman answered all of our questions with full assurance and perhaps even talked down to us on a couple of occasions. Vehicle suggestions appeared to be driven more by dealership availability than our stated needs.

Finally, during the process of financial negotiations for the new vehicle and our trade-in, he insulted our intelligence. We left

disappointed, angry and convinced that we will return to that dealership about as often as Iowa changes U.S. senators.

Off to the Brand B dealership. Here we were hoping to work with a specific salesperson but, since we hadn't made a prior appointment, we were informed he was unavailable for the next hour. Tim informed us that we could wait or he would be happy to help us. Pressed for time, we opted for the latter.

What we experienced over the next hour was the polar opposite of our experience with Brand A. Tim assumed a role of servant salesman, listened carefully to our needs and, without a hint of trying to upsell us, matched us almost perfectly with the right vehicle.

Now the moment of truth

... the price. Again Tim listened as we explained we abhorred the negotiation process. "Just give us your best price," we requested. Tim's first offer was fair, accepted, and we had a deal completed within 90 minutes of driving onto the lot.

**It's been said that the easiest customer to get is the one you already have. Don't let poor sales processes and skills undue all of your marketing and product/service development efforts.**

Did Brand B leave some money on the table?

Perhaps they could have squeezed a few more hundred dollars out of the deal. But as we left the lot in our new car, Brand B had two customers that had graduated from satisfied to loyal. When the time arrives for our next vehicle search, we will begin the

process with Brand B ... the business will be theirs to lose.

I'm reminded of that experience every time I receive one of the roughly two dozen pieces of mail from Brand A, mail that gets discarded unopened.

Wouldn't that marketing investment be better spent on developing sales processes and staff that don't chase potential customers away?

Whether your employees are selling cars or cups of coffee, their behaviors predictably draw customers back or persuade them to visit competitors. Identify those behaviors, train your employees and audit for compliance. Make sure that the tools and systems they use provide for a smooth transaction when someone wants to buy from you.

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**RICK BRIMEYER** is the president of Brimeyer LLC, an independent management consulting firm located in Ames which guides organizations to higher performance by focusing on process improvement and leadership development. Further information is available at [www.brimeyerllc.com](http://www.brimeyerllc.com) or by calling (515) 450-8855.

