

The First Line of Defense

EDUCATE EMPLOYEES ON CUSTOMER SERVICE.

by Gina Binole

When it comes to winning customers, small businesses face increasing competition – from Web-based shopping convenience to large national chains. Rather than give up what traditionally has been their turf, some mom-and-pops are battling back by teaching employees how to dress, how to act, how to sell, how to greet and even how to smile when they don't feel like it.

When customers call Benjamin Franklin Plumbing in Rogersville, Mo., they're greeted with: "Thank you for calling Benjamin Franklin, the Punctual Plumber. How may we save you time today?"

The tone is as honest as you'd expect from the Founding Father himself, says owner Ellen Rohr. To encourage professional and friendly attitudes among her staff, Rohr implemented a rule: If you don't use the proper phone greeting and conduct yourself in a courteous manner, you owe five bucks to whomever in the office hears you blow it.

"Right now I am smiling," says Rohr, who believes in role-playing and scripts. "It is an absolutely forced smile. But you can hear a difference in my voice if I'm not smiling. I insist my employees smile."

Rohr is just as strict in service training for plumbers at the year-old company, since she's often battling a deeply ingrained stereotype. Benjamin Franklin plumbers don white shirts emblazoned with an American flag, and if they're not



ELLEN ROHR

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on time, they owe customers a Ben Franklin – a \$100 bill.

Greg Hund, owner of a Mail Boxes Etc. franchise located on Manhattan's Upper West Side, works with employees individually, and frequently, on everything from voice quality to body posture. Hund's employees must greet customers with "Good morning," "Good afternoon" or "Good evening," instead of, "Who's next?"

"I think it's criminal how under-trained some employees are, particularly when the payoff is so big," says Hund, whose store is ranked in the top 10 of the 4,500 franchise stores worldwide.

Hund stresses the accolades aren't all his. He provides incentives and makes the hard work pay off for employees. He gives out monthly bonuses, provided the store ranks No. 1 in the region.

"I know they will ask why they should work their butts off on all this training," he says. "And I absolutely believe there must be something in it for them too. If you don't treat your employees well, they won't treat your customers with respect."

91%

Keep Them Happy

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