

30. Nurturing Your Clients

It's a lot cheaper to spend time, money and effort to keep an existing client than it is to go out and find a new one.

It's amazing how some companies will focus all their time and resources on finding and selling new customers, and then spend no time and effort on keeping them.

In any business – but in this business in particular – it's important to focus on developing clients than on selling customers. What's the difference? A customer is somebody you sell a product once, but you sell time and time again.

For all the time and effort it takes to find a new client, it's really important to nurture that client once we've got her. And it's a lot cheaper, not to mention easier, to keep an existing client than it is to go out and replace her with a new one.

Guaranteed Appointments

- A common complaint I hear is about house cleaners (and house cleaning services) that they are counted on to show up on the day and time. It's frustrating for a client to get the house picked up ready for the day, and then come home to a dirty house because the cleaner failed to keep their appointment. It's even worse if the cleaner comes over for the evening and now you have to get up and clean the house before the guests arrive.
- Offering guaranteed appointments, you demonstrate your commitment to good service and it helps build goodwill and trust with both existing and potential clients. Your guarantee is that your company will keep its cleaning appointments with regular clients—or will return the day for free. This is easy enough to do. The guarantee is for a particular day—not a particular time.

When you do have a day when you can't clean everyone, call one of your clients and ask for permission to change their cleaning day. If they say no, thank them anyway, and call a different client. Most clients won't mind if you switch days as long as you ask. What they don't want is expecting a clean home and then being surprised and disappointed that their home is still dirty when they arrive after work—and that no one bothered to call to tell them.

Oven & Refrigerator Free for Weeklies

- One thing you can do is offer free cleaning of the oven and the interior of the refrigerator to weekly clients. It's easy to keep these items clean when you clean every week. For example, you can open the refrigerator and quickly wipe one shelf each week.
- Similarly with the oven—open it and use your pumice stone to get rid of any spills that have occurred since you cleaned the week before.
- Especially in these days of self-cleaning ovens and refrigerators, maintaining an oven and a refrigerator is usually not very difficult. What you get in return—a client who produces repeat business—is well worth the little bit of extra time. *Tip: Offer to clean these items the first time you visit a client to show your willingness to maintain them in a clean condition.*

Flowers for Your Clients

- One very nice touch is to bring a small arrangement of carnations and a frond of leather fern in a small vase to your clients. This is a nice touch for regular clients. When you visit a client's house, they're happy enough, but when you come home with a carnation and a pretty little flower, they're thrilled. The sight of a carnation and a pretty little flower, you're once again creating a good impression that's so important for your business.
- Your clients will tell their friends about the flowers and tell their friends. This increases your reputation, which is vital to your business. Bringing flowers to your clients is even more reason to tell their friends about your service. You'll start receiving phone calls from people who want to know something like, "Is this the service you have? How often do they clean?"
- Simplify your activity by setting up a 30-day account with a convenient, local florist. Stop by once a day (*either early or late, depending on your schedule*) to pick up the carnations and ferns. (*During colder weather, you can often pick up flowers every other day.*) Carnations and leather ferns are recommended because they are hardy and long-lasting. Leave them wrapped the way the florist gives them to you. Carry them in the kitchen tray, and have the kitchen crew put them in the vase for the client. Make sure the note from the florist is right next to the vase.
- Florists have small vases that cost only pennies. Especially when your business is young and growing, you'll need new vases as you add new clients. When you return to clean your clients on a repetitive basis, use the original vase over and over again. Tell your clients that you'll replace the flowers each time you come so they'll leave the vase out for you. Actually, these particular plants are so hardy that often they'll

still be out and looking good when you arrive to clean again a week or two later

Commitments

- One of the biggest and most common complaints about service businesses is when they leave clients hanging until the last minute and only then change a commitment. An example of how to avoid this is to call the her at 2:30 to tell her that you're going to be late for your 2:00 appointment with them. Or, call a client at 11:00 AM. to let them know that you can't clean for them that day because they're already late for work waiting for the team to arrive. This is promising to be late.
- If you know on Monday that you're scheduled to be working on Thursday than you can possibly do, don't wait until Thursday morning to try to solve the problem. Call the client on Monday and make the necessary changes. Clients appreciate initiative and you're concerned about their cleaning job so you're making changes, and they usually avoid the client dissatisfaction of waiting until the last minute.
- The same is true if you know on Monday that you have a conflict that prevents you from being there for a 2 P.M. appointment. DON'T WAIT UNTIL 2 P.M. TO CALL THE CLIENT. As before, call the client as soon as you know of the problem. If you call before the client has been waiting for you, or if you call early enough to let them know your change in schedule, you'll likely never lose a client because you have an occasional scheduling snafu.

Access — Keys

To be able to schedule most efficiently, you need keys to your client's homes. And if you're cleaning during the same hours most of your clients are at home. There are few other simple options for getting into a client's home than having a key.

Most clients understand and are willing to give you a key. When explaining your service over the telephone, be sure that you let the client know that you work during normal business hours and that you have keys to most of your clients homes. Tell them that the keys are coded and don't have either the clients name or address on them. Because of this precaution, if a team should lose a whole ring of keys someday, they would do whoever found them absolutely no good.

- Also tell the potential client that after you develop the quote and they agree to the price, we can clean the first time without a key. For the first-time clean, you can arrive either the "first" morning appointment or the last appointment of the day. *(If the client works, then the first morning appointment is often best because the client can't get home late for work as a result of waiting to let you in, but can't get home in the middle of the day to do the same thing. If the client doesn't work, or there is someone usually at home, try to schedule the first-time cleaning for last appointment of the day.)*
- Tell the client that this will give them a chance to get their house cleaned before you will be doing the cleaning and that you will call a few days after that first cleaning to make sure they like the team and the cleaning work. As long as those things went well, at that point you normally need a key so that from now on your team can go in and do their regular cleaning on their regular scheduled day.
- If the client has a dead bolt or alarm system, it's usually easiest for them to give you a copy of the manual, and teach them how to use the alarm system. Some clients do not give you a dead bolt key or show you how to use the alarm system. These clients plan on leaving the dead bolt unlocked and the alarm off on the day we clean. There are two reasons why this is a bad idea:
 1. The business should not be responsible for the client's safety.
 2. The client should be responsible for locking the dead bolt or not to set the alarm on. These things are surprisingly difficult to do, and many clients when they are charged you usually can't get in to clean. If you can't get in, our recommended cancellation policy is 100% of the original cleaning fee.
- It's not safe for the client to mail you a key—just tell them to take the precaution of not putting their address inside or outside the envelope and identify the key only by their name. Tell them you'll watch for their mail and call them to let them know when it arrives safely.
- Some clients will tell you they don't need to give you a key because you always come to their house first thing in the morning. Do not do this, because of the way you clean in a team effort where you'll be cleaning several houses a day, you just can't keep a commitment to always come to the house at the same time each week—especially first AM., since that's when you will often clean for a new client the first time. In addition, you need some flexibility in your schedule to be able to honor a request from a client to come at a different time on a particular week because they have company coming, or adding or deleting clients, or other good reasons. If you lock yourself into going

to a certain place first, you're creating ongoing scheduling and traveling problems.

- If you do agree to go first thing in the morning for a client despite this warning, at least tell them that occasionally you will need to come at a later time and that you will call them when that happens. When that does happen (*and it will*), it's not fair for them to then cancel the rest of the day—they should allow you the flexibility you need to be late when necessary.
- Even doormen may not be satisfactory for letting you into a building. They aren't always around. Neighbors, landlords, or other staffers may have their drawback unless they are home all day, or available all morning or all afternoon.
- If a client says they will always have a key to the main door, you should warn them that burglars look for door marks and keys. If there was a burglary, how would they ever know who did it?
- If a client won't give you a key, insist that they always arrive at a certain time, if possible. It's likely you'll be able to clean for very long before either the client or the doorman gets angry and gives-up. It's fine to try to communicate with the clients—and you certainly shouldn't be afraid to tell the client what they want you to change. If you can't do business in some cases they may be asking for more money. You should even have a deposit. You need the freedom to schedule in the way that allows you to make a profit.
- If a client has a DOB, give a key for should have access to the building. Record this on the Client Control Form, for example., "client has key to building," "call office with ETA." "see landlord in apt. #402," "see neighbor, but no steps between 2 and 4 P.M. so don't arrive during this time."

State Records to Clients Happy

If you promise to wash windows for a regular client, write that in the schedule for the correct date.

If a client cancels, cross out their name on all future dates where it appears.

- ✓ If you promise an "extra" cleaning for a client, enter it in the schedule on the appropriate day.
- ✓ If you promise to return to correct a complaint, do the same thing.

- ✓ If you do promise to arrive by a certain time write the time promised next to the client's name on the correct day.
- ✓ Record any special notices for your teams as follows:
 1. Campbell wants the oven cleaned today. Leave [blank] for [blank]
 2. Jones wants the first-floor windows cleaned (not the insides). He is leaving \$25 for this work (he was charged last time for these same windows).
 3. Return to Hammond to fix main bathroom floor. Call him when it's dry it doesn't look clean. Use Tine Turner and a white pad.
 4. Brown wants you to clean their house on the Avenue because they have company coming from [blank] town this [blank] noon.

Negotiating Price

- Some clients will try to negotiate your price. Here are a couple of suggestions to discuss with this client.
- Tell them the first time cleaning the weekly or biweekly prices are set but you will discuss with the team after they start the weekly or biweekly cleaning and the price could be lowered. In other words, if you clean it a couple of times, you will find out if it should be cleaned for less compared to the first time.
- If you find out that you've, indeed, overpriced it and can lower the price at that point. You can do the same thing the other way around by telling the client that you will lower the price for now, but if you clean it regularly, if the price should be higher, then you will charge the price back up to where you originally had it.
- Another suggestion is to tell the client that you could clean less of the house. For example, if the client lives in a two story house, you could agree to clean the master bath, the kitchen, and the living room each week. This leaves the other rooms down stairs one time, and then the other rooms upstairs the next time.
- If you're using our pricing formula – and assuming you've become very good at estimating the amount of cleaning time involved, don't make a habit of negotiating your cleaning price. You need to remain true to the formula. Making a habit of negotiating price is a dangerous trap to fall into. It's important that you maintain the profit margin you

need to get a return on your time and investment. And it's downright critical that you get what you need to pay the team what they need and to pay a fair share of your overhead.

Client Complaints

- The most important thing to do when a client complains is to say you're sorry. It's a simple thing to do, you really are, and it's what's needed to complain about your house cleaning service. It's the most effective good-client-service response you can make.
- Then, thank them for complaining. When clients complain it gives you a chance to correct the work or solve the problem. If you don't want to complain, but just call up and cancel, you don't even have a chance to fix the problem, so you really aren't thankful when they complain. Just say, "Thanks for letting us a chance to correct the problem."
- Then solve the problem. If a client has overpaid for something or otherwise made a mistake, it's better for your business to go back and fix what you can. Don't have this client quit and tell all their friends about how terrible you were.
- WHEN A CLIENT COMPLAINS ALWAYS WRITE IT ON THE CLIENT CONTRACT FORM. If you want to be sure you possibly can that you don't make the same mistake again with this client. By recording it in your contract you can lead yourself each time you go to clean, and make sure that you don't make the same mistake again. If it isn't recorded, the mistake could occur again, and this time you could not complete the job and you may get a cancellation instead.

DEALING WITH THE "CLIENT FROM HELL"

No matter how hard you try to satisfy your customers' needs, there will be times when you will encounter a client whose attitude and demands would test the effectiveness of even the best high blood pressure medication and your ability to refrain from "blowing your stack."

When you are confronted by a client who is "snorting fire" and ripping you up one side and down the other, it is human nature to react defensively. We tend to take the affront personally. It can stretch our capacity to remain calm under fire.

The Customer is NOT Always Right . . . BUT . . .

- It's not a question of whether or not the customer is right; it's whether or not she THINKS she's right. In most cases, a complaining client does make what he or she thinks is an accurate claim about which they have been wronged. A big mistake many businesses make is to take the complaint as a personal insult. When we do we may react inappropriately with the result that the situation becomes exacerbated and we end up in a no-win argument. This often results in a tattered and irreparable business relationship.
- When we're dealing with a complaining client, however, we adopt the attitude that the customer in question is wrong and we concern – and take the position that she is NOT right. Whether in fact she is right or wrong. The reality is that she is not right and this can be a positive opportunity to actually improve your relationship with the client by solving her problem.

Sometimes You Have to Bite the Bullet

- If you're in business, you will eventually run into customers who seem bent on giving you severe grief. They're demanding, rude, obnoxious, belligerent, unreasonable, and downright nasty.
- Sometimes you're faced with a customer who's demanding their money, firing them and making an unreasonable demand for the satisfaction!
- Some customers make the "What's the earth for? you offer to refund this customer's money after all the work was performed and expense was incurred."
- If a customer complains, could there be a case that the client didn't qualify for the refund? And, if right or right. However, why let this customer continue to rant and rave on negative thoughts instead of positive ones for the sake of \$125 (or whatever the price was)? It's just a matter of the aggravation, the time or the heartburn. Pay her off and put her behind you. After all, what legitimate reason could this client possibly have to complain to anyone about when you offer to refund her money without an argument.

Customers Want a Particular Day

Obviously, if you can do this, you will. It's when that day isn't convenient for the team, or that day is already full that it becomes a problem. You can't spend more time driving all the way across town to clean one house than it will take to clean the house itself. Tell your client the truth.

- If you aren't in their neighborhood on the day they want you to clean or the team doesn't have room on its schedule, tell them so and don't promise to change their day when you are able. Write the request on the Client Control Form. If there is very little chance that you will be able to make the change in the near future, tell the client. Once they stop using the service, they will realize that the day makes very little difference anyway. But if you mislead them, they likely will complain with you later on.

Clients Who Want a Certain Amount of Time Spent Cleaning

- Some clients are used to hiring cleaners from the home they grew up in and request "four hours of cleaning" on how you spend in a day and therefore get more work done in a shorter period of time than they are probably used to. Explain to them that your system of working by the job and that you work hard to be efficient—arrive in, clean the house, and move on without wasting time. It's not that you're rushing, or not doing more thorough cleaning, but that you're applying modern time and efficiency to be able to clean more efficiently.
- Occasionally a client who used to tell you the team was only at their house for 45 minutes (*not a problem*) may think that isn't long enough to properly clean their house. They may have a complaint about the cleanliness. If they do, you should know how to handle complaints. If they don't have a complaint, they may just feel you should stay longer. Explain to them that you're known as the fastest and most efficient and speedy house cleaners and tell them that it's not necessary to apologize for the time it takes to properly clean.

Clients Who Want to "Trade Cleaning Jobs"

If the client wants to trade cleaning jobs, and it's a fair trade, you should be happy to accommodate them. However, if a client wants to trade cleaning the spare bedroom (*which takes about 3 minutes*) for cleaning all the windows in their house inside and out (*which takes an hour or more*), that's not a fair trade. That's the test—if it's a fair trade, you're happy to do it. If it's not a fair trade, you're still happy to do it, but you'll charge them for the difference.

Caring for Plants

- In general, decline to do this. It's too difficult to know when a potted plant will overflow, and it's expensive if it overflows onto a wood floor

or other surface and causes permanent damage. The client will let you to pay for this damage. Also, if the plants should die, the client tends to blame you. As house cleaners who may only come every other week, that's not often enough for plant care. Water requirements at different times of the year, formulas for fertilizing and bugs or plant diseases that may need treatment are beyond your employees' expertise as house cleaners.

Client Vacations

- The exception to your general rule to do a weekly cleaning when your client is going out of town for vacation. You can offer to help them keep their plants alive during this time. They would pay for this. In an attempt to get them to continue to pay for cleaning services while they are out of town, you can offer to do a deep cleaning service instead of the normal routine. For example, you could offer to wash windows, do a "spring clean" and make the furniture to be cleaned vacuum there, or to wash walls in bathrooms if they need it. You can often save the money you would have lost if you were on vacation by offering these alternatives.

Holidays

- At times your business will be affected because of holidays. Remind your weekly and bi-weekly clients in advance of those times (such as Thanksgiving, etc.) when they will miss cleaning their home. You can do this by email, by text message from the team leader, by form letter to the team leader, or by a personal phone call to the client. Whichever way you decide, try to reschedule these cleanings at a different time to save the revenue and to offer the best service to your client.

Diligence

Diligence means doing what you were hired to do (in your case, to clean houses) using acceptable methods. The reason it's mentioned here is because accidents happen often enough that you're responsible for them when accidents happen that aren't your fault because you were using due diligence, you shouldn't be liable. Here are a couple of examples:

1. You're using your feather duster on a picture on the wall and the picture falls and breaks. You were doing exactly what you were hired to do and you were doing it in an acceptable manner. You shouldn't have to pay for this accident. The client should have

hung the picture with a bigger nail or a stronger wire or both. If the client knows you shouldn't touch that picture because it was precariously hung but didn't tell you, it's still not your fault. If the client did tell you and the team forgot to read that information on the Client Control Form, then it's your fault.

- 2. The client asks you to dust the track lights. Your worker uses the extension duster to dust them and they fall down. Again, you were doing what you were asked to do and using the proper technique. The client's complaint should be more with the person who installed the track lights, and less with you and your company.
- Please do be careful. It's surprising how easy it is to get hurt in a home. It's also surprising how often it can be avoided with diligence always—but use caution and protection also.

Client Form Letters

- We have provided examples of form letters for various occasions that you may wish to email or use as a template. These examples should be typed or printed on company stationery. Sign them personally if a signature is needed (such as on your invoice *on mail*) a form letter, write it on company stationery so that you won't leave duplicates in the future. Put a checkmark in the name of the form letter left and the date in the right margin.



Documents relating to
Nurturing Your Clients

Client Form Letters

Client Survey Card

NO PRINTING