

Stop Hiring! Audition!

By T. Scott Gross

If there was one thing...one simple thing, that I could attribute to turning our business around it would be this—better hiring. No, make that, better auditioning.

Ron Zemke has a name for that quality of personality that allows employees to handle one customer after another without going absolutely nuts. He calls it high customer contact tolerance.

Of course, there are less sophisticated ways to describe the same phenomenon. Farmers put it rather bluntly when they admonish us to “never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time...and it irritates the pig!”

However you call it, there are some folks who are, by bent of personality, simply unsuited to work that requires constant customer contact. Period. Can you train these folks to love on the customer? Yes...except that the methods required to effect such a transformation aren't legal in this country!

That leaves us with this: If you intend to build sales through Positively Outrageous Service, the only way out is through hiring people who thrive on customer contact. There is no middle ground.

For those of you who have trouble admitting defeat, those who say, “I know I can save him,” you're just whistling in the dark. You cannot, you will not turn just anybody into someone who will provide Positively Outrageous Service.

Now is the time to make two decisions. First, if you have

someone who is not a natural lover of customers on your payroll, decide now, right now, to turn them loose so that you and they can get on with life. Send them off to someplace where they can be successful. Stop trying to turn them into someone they are not. Decision two? Give up hiring and start auditioning. That's right, auditioning.

We learned three simple tricks for auditioning: echo, telephone, and monologue.

Echo is as simple as giving an applicant a series of orders or instructions and asking them to repeat. Think about it. Most screw ups have at their root a failure to listen carefully to the customer. Play a good game of echo using typical customer requests is a great way to discover if your candidate has the ability to listen and retain.

Tactic two: telephone. Use a real or imagined telephone to call your applicant. You play the part of a customer who has a problem or a complaint. What a great way...and a fine time, to discover if your applicant is willing to do whatever it takes to make a customer happy.

Using this technique you will soon discover if your applicants can think on their feet or if, when confronted with an unusual or tense situation, are likely to pass the problem off on you rather than making a command decision.

The last technique we call monologue. Ask the applicant to greet you. Then ask them to do it again only different. Repeat this a half dozen times

and in short order you will know if this person has enough imagination to think out of the box or if you will have to direct every move. Modify the technique slightly and ask an applicant to attempt to sell you one of your products or services. Trust me, if they can't sell you in the audition, there is no way they will sell when left alone.

Three techniques—echo, telephone and monologue—that will turn around the way you think about hiring. Better yet, these techniques will result in a crew that is both willing and able to deliver Positively Outrageous Service!