

Winning at Retail

by Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

Retail is one of the most complex, challenging and competitive business arenas in the world. The advent of a rapidly expanding global economy and the internet has made it even more so. It's no longer just a process of create interest and sell them. It's no longer just a process of advertise it and they will come. Today, being good is simply not good enough — you need to be amazing! You need to be the best!

One of those aspects that will bring you to the top, to being the best, is ensuring customer service is fully embedded in your selling process. After all:

**Customer Service is not just a part of your business.
Customer Service is your business!**

If you are not constantly looking at new, innovative ways to take care of your customers, to make their experience better, to make it easier for them to do business with your company — rest assured our competition will be.

Across the globe our business is changing rapidly to accommodate and assist the changing needs, desires and demands of our customers. Susan Marthaller counsels us to, "Always think of your customers as suppliers first. Work closely with them, so they can supply you with the information you need to supply them with the right products and services." Our ability to help our customers is directly related to our willingness to put ourselves in their shoes and truly see things from their perspective.

In their book, **WINNING AT RETAIL**, Willard N. Ander and Neil Z. Stern explore what separates the winners from the losers in retail. Their guidance is based on a long history of studying and documenting retail's biggest players and best practices. What has worked and how can you apply it?

Retail's top leaders share a common drive. They've carved out a specific place in the mind of consumers by establishing or defining (at all costs) being the best at something.

One of my clients is Canada's top Furniture retailer. **Nobody Beats The Brick!** is a declaration and example of their dedication to be the best and to provide the best.

True customer service is anticipating our client's needs and re-positioning ourselves to meet and exceed them. When you decide to be the best, your staffing issues, processes, and training concerns will be challenged too.

- How will your firm best equip you to effectively deal with the changes you'll experience as you re-invent yourselves?
- How can your leadership provide the necessary tools to equip you to win in this challenge?

J. Marriot, Jr, of the famous Marriot hotel chain, shares, "Motivate them, train them, care about them and make winners out of them... we know that if we treat our employees correctly, they'll treat the customers right. And, if the customers are treated right, they'll come back." We win when you win!

Point to Ponder:

**Customer Service is not just a part of your business.
Customer Service is your business!**

The 'Est' model for retail success, as introduced in WINNING AT RETAIL, encourages retail leaders to define their companies in one of five critical areas —

- assortment (biggest),
- price (cheapest),
- fashion (hottest),
- customer service (easiest),
- and speed (quickest).

For example, one of my clients' (The Brick) leadership team devoured Winning at Retail and began exploring and studying this concept in May 2005. Their decision was an increased focus on enhancing Customer Service (easiest to do business with).

The Brick was already well established in this position with the products and services, processes and people already in place to create solid ownership of this critical area in the minds of Canadian consumers. They have invested in new training, promotion, marketing, and leadership initiatives to expand on this focus and get the message out. We even helped them write a book called **The Brick Way** (10,000 initial copies) which reinforces this personal leadership and customer service focus for their teams.

Ander and Stern defined **service from a customer's perspective**:

- (1) knowing what I want and having it in stock;
- (2) helping me find the product I'm looking for easily without wasting my time;
- (3) providing information to answer my questions and assist me in making an intelligent choice—with signs, brochures, a salesperson, via the internet; and, after you've done the first three right,
- (4) having friendly, knowledgeable people.

I would challenge you and your sales team to consider where your company can stake the claim to being the best. What will it take?

- Perhaps it will take a while to make this a reality?
- Perhaps a few changes in your policies, procedures, and training?
- Perhaps some new ideas in how you promote?
- Perhaps some new ideas in how you interact with your potential customers?
- Perhaps some changes in how you create and deal with the selling process itself?

With this focus in mind, you can revise your approach to selling and to serving your customers. With this focus in mind, I believe you can start Winning At Retail. I believe this will help you in your selling skills and create some amazing results in your sales figures over the next year.

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Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey, DTM, PRA, CKD-Emeritus, Accredited Speaker, 2011 Spirit of CAPS recipient is an inspirational leader, speaker, and a prolific author whose works include **'Legacy of Leadership, Strive for significance – lead on purpose!'**, **'Speaking for Success'** and **'The Courage to Lead!'** His articles have been featured in a multitude of North American trade and global consumer publications. He is a respected leader who has been honored by CAPS, NSA, Toastmasters, and the United Nations for his leadership contributions. His creative Ideas At Work have allowed him to travel the globe sharing insights, encouragement in 61 countries, so far. With Covid-19 he has been zooming around the globe to share his ideas. His **innovative Ideas At Work!** have been successfully applied by global leaders as well as Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies.