

# The CSW ADVANTAGE

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CSW Corporate Solutions LLC appreciates the opportunity to send you our E-newsletter *The CSW Advantage*. Our intent is to provide at least one idea every couple of weeks that you can use to make your company more profitable. You will find the content focused on developing customer loyalty and separating yourself from the competition.

In this issue, Cindy Williams shares her attitude on working with customers when she previously owned a Honda dealership. The example is appropriate considering the current state of the automobile industry. Today, she brings the same philosophy to work every day at CSW for our client's benefit.

## How Far Would Your Customers Drive?

Why would someone drive three hours to buy a car? Or, fly from Boston to Oklahoma to buy a car? Don't they have cars in Boston, Dallas, or Houston? Sure they do. But twenty-five years ago 80% of my customers did not live anywhere near my Honda dealership in McAlester, OK.

Hondas were and are popular cars. Most of the time my customers found out about me from a friend or a business associate or talking with someone while filling up with gasoline at a gas station. What they heard was this lady is honest. She remains in contact throughout the process (in those days people were put on a list and called when their particular car was allocated by the factory) and that process could take days or months.

Twenty-five years ago we didn't have the benefit of the Internet. All the transactions took place via telephone or by U.S. Mail.

I worked hard to build the company from selling 1 Honda our first month to eventually selling 250 cars a month. Just by being customer friendly. When a customer called they got a prompt answer. My home phone number was on my business cards. They didn't use that number often because **I called them**. Good news or bad. They knew everything I knew.

I'd mail them brochures with their car pictured in it. The next week I would mail them an accessory book to browse. A week later I mailed them a same color die-cast model of

their new car. Cars would come available in their areas but they would continue to wait to do business with me. Why? Follow-up, follow-up, and more follow-up.

Generally, my out of town customers wanted to pick up their vehicle on Saturday. I'd let each one know about sights along the road. Where the best fruit stands were, where Reba McIntire grew up, and funny anecdotes about things they'd see on their trip. I shared where they could get the best root beer or the best Italian food. I even shared where I knew the police would most likely be ready to stop speeders.

I always told them how many cars I had to personally deliver that day. Many times it was 10 or 12 on a Saturday. My detail man – God bless Cecil – would come in early on Saturday to get them started. By noon there was a line up of beautiful new Hondas filled with fuel, paper tags installed, keys on nice key fobs, warranty books filled out in the glove box, and a big bow if I knew it was a special occasion. And, always at my side was my “touch up tubby” – Windex, fabric cleaner, soft cloth – just in case.

**Everything a customer expected was exactly as expected.**

The parade of “friends” would begin to arrive. It was grounds for termination not to open the door for a customer at my Honda dealership. And customers were greeted with a warm and genuine smile.

First come first served for the delivery process. Everyone deserved the exact same treatment as the next person. Many Saturday mornings some of the old-timers in town would stop by for a free cup of coffee. They'd sit outside on benches listening to the deliveries and often find they knew someone in common.

One couple arrived on a Saturday to pick up their new Honda wagon driving a big blue Cadillac Sedan Deville. Although I had sent them literature on the wagon they'd never really seen one for real. Let's face it – they were ugly, yet very versatile. The wife immediately said, “It's so ugly.” I responded that I felt that way at first until I learned all the cars benefits. I told her one day it just grew on me. She laughed and said they had to drive a lot and she doubted it would ever grow on her. But, for \$5,995 she would try to like it.

A few weeks later the couple drove all the way back on a nice afternoon in the wagon just to tell me I was right. It did grow on them and they hadn't driven the Cadillac since they got the Honda wagon. I continued to stay in contact with them as I did with all my customers. They sent so many referrals I lost count.

There was only one time the delivery didn't go as planned. The customer wanted a red Prelude with air-conditioning. As I went through showing them their new car and came to the part about how to operate the air I realized the air had not been installed. (In those days air and radio were dealer installed.) I was mortified. They had driven four hours to get their dream car.

I ran into the dealership and called my Honda tech and offered double pay to come immediately and install the air-conditioning unit. I went back to the couple and told them the dilemma. I also told them of the great Italian food our town was famous for and about Joe's Italian Grocery. I gave them my car and sent them to eat and explore. I called the restaurant and grocery and said, “Charge it to me.” The couple came back with handfuls of doggie bags and groceries. Their car was ready with the newly installed air-conditioning unit. They told me they had never had such a fun time buying a car.

I realized, I had to make car buying fun for everyone of my customers and began to look for ways to make car buying fun.

One night I was leaving the store, it was late, I was tired and cold, and it was a few days before Christmas. The phone rang and I almost didn't answer. There was a gentleman on the phone who said he was from Arkansas. He went on to say he knew it was probably a hopeless situation but his banker told him to call me. He wanted to buy a red Honda Prelude for his granddaughter's Christmas gift.

I told him it must be a Christmas miracle. I had that specific Prelude delivered that day. He agreed it was meant for his gift and he would be Santa himself if he could figure out how to get it to Bentonville, Arkansas. I told him I would drive it myself and have it to him by noon the next day if he could get me to a bus station for my return trip. He agreed. I told him I'd bring all the paperwork with me and we would fill out the title papers the next day. He expressed his sincere thanks over the telephone.

I went home, made a huge red bow, cut out a big card from the kid's art supplies and signed it "From the Greatest Granddad in the World." After all, I realized, he was so nice I forgot to ask his name.

The next morning I headed east with my map to deliver this extra special Christmas gift. When I arrived at the address, a warm and friendly man was at the office door to greet me with hot apple cider. He had on jeans and a soft flannel shirt and gave me the biggest hug I've ever received. Taking my hand he said, "So nice to meet you in person, I'm Sam Walton."

Talk about being shocked! We sat in his office drinking apple cider while he called his banker who had asked to come over when I arrived. I wasn't sure who his banker was but who cared? I was getting to know Sam Walton. Then I got the second big surprise of the day when Sam Walton's banker walked in and it was the man who had bought the Honda wagon. He joked with me that he and his wife fought over who got to drive the Honda and who had to drive the Cadillac.

We finished our business and Mr. Sam, as he insisted I call him, escorted me out to his aged pickup truck and dropped me off at the bus station. I was on such a high on the three hour trip back home.

I stayed in touch with Mr. Sam, sold all of his family cars and provided cars for Walmart senior management. Not having computers back then I lost track of how many degrees of separation that one trip to Arkansas led to increased sales for my dealership.

Some years later I sold the dealership and began working for Chrysler consulting with their dealerships. Today, I am vice-president of CSW Corporate Solutions and believe the same principles I practiced in business twenty-five years ago apply today. I always enjoy a sense of pride when CSW works with a Chrysler dealership and I see the slogan "We're better, we'll prove it" displayed on a banner. That was the national campaign slogan for Chrysler several years ago. During an executive meeting one day in Detroit, the idea came to me and I jotted it down on the back of my name tag. The president of Chrysler saw it and the next week the slogan was a national campaign.

A customer service example from the automobile industry may not seem appropriate in light of the recent bankruptcy of Chrysler and General Motors. But, I think it is a perfect

example of how companies over time can stray away from the goal of business. At CSW we want to make a fair profit by providing our services and products to solve a client's need. Today is no different than twenty-five years ago when great customer service and finding ways of connecting to customers sets you apart from the competition.

I know experts say we are in a recession, but I refuse to participate. I do wonder if we've lost the ability to say as I do and do as I say. Many companies may have lost the true art of salesmanship – honesty and integrity.

Think about in just the last week how many times did someone refer you to someone they do business with? Very few today take the time to create a relationship. Studies show a customer for a large ticket item takes six contacts by different methods before they buy. Before I delivered a Honda I usually had made at least eight contacts with the customer. And, we didn't have Internet, email, or cell phones.

Regardless what business you are in, the future of its success is your customer.  
**However you choose to treat customers, they will do the same for you.**