

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Receptionist knew how to make unforgettable impression



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While executive management sets the example for their company's culture, it is the receptionist who has a dramatic impact on how visitors perceive the culture of a company. The following anecdote depicts my experience with the world's greatest receptionist.

During a recent business trip to St. Louis, I visited a consultant friend at his office. He is a very successful consultant so I fully expected his office to reflect his passion for excellence. After I parked my rental car and walked into his office building I immediately noticed that the foyer was neat, aesthetic and inviting. I stopped in my tracks for two seconds just to survey the beautiful environment. Everything seemed so perfect. However, my two seconds of stunned silence was about to escalate into an epiphany.

As I approached the receptionist, I had the sensation that this was not going to be a typical encounter. The receptionist's greeting clearly set her apart as a world-class person who understood her vital role. Her name was Pauline. Her vocal tone, body language and hand gestures were impeccable. Pauline inquired about the nature of my visit, asked me if

I wanted a beverage and was overall very happy to meet me. In essence she was upbeat.

I asked Pauline what motivated her to perform her role with such positive enthusiasm. She smiled, looked me in the eye, and then floored me with a simple and eloquent response.

"I am the Director of First Impressions," she said in a straightforward and authoritative manner.

After a few moments of stunned silence, I admitted to Pauline I had never heard of that job title before. My response brought a smile to Pauline's face. Clearly, she was enjoying making my day.

So I asked about the duties and responsibilities of a Director of First Impressions. Again, without much hesitation, Pauline was able to clearly describe her job.

"My responsibilities to this company are to alleviate any unnecessary worries and concerns regarding the reception

area and its surroundings, monitor deliveries, keep chairs neat and tidy, remove finger prints from my desk, conference rooms, the coffee area and in general keep things as immaculate as possible."

Wow, I thought. This person is a strong corporate asset. She has a total grasp of her contribution to this company.

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~ Pauline, St. Louis receptionist

Pauline obviously had a great attitude, and this impacts her aptitude. Yes, Pauline's ability to perform her receptionist role is enhanced by her daily choice to make others feel terrific when they enter her reception area.

Still awestruck, I asked Pauline if I could quote her for an upcoming Business

Journal column. She responded with a yes, so I continued by inquiring about her last name. Retrieving my pen to write her last name on my memo pad, again, Pauline stunned me with a simple gesture of handing me her own business card. Not a generic company business

card, but the real deal. This business card had her name on it. This was a first, a receptionist with a business card. Her employer obviously takes her role seriously enough to buy her business cards.

Pauline makes a choice to be positive and to convey the very best to visitors. Naturally, this yields a win-win result for her employer and for the business relationships. It's all about first impressions and how callers or visitors will judge a company based on the receptionist's performance.

Pauline's ability to perform her role with such professionalism is in stark contrast to the mediocre and perfunctory receptionist behavior I sometimes encounter at other firms. This mediocrity is usually a manifestation of management's discounting the receptionist role as mistakenly unimportant.

So I urge readers of my column to rise above the mediocre and take their receptionist's role more seriously. I urge company owners and managers to save this article and then inculcate Pauline's "Director of First Impressions" approach to a receptionist's demeanor. And, for goodness sake, buy your receptionist a stack of business cards.

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