How to Create Customer Love in a Category That People Hate

In this ongoing series, we are sharing advice, tips and insights from real entrepreneurs who are out there doing business battle on a daily basis. (Answers have been edited and condensed for clarity.)

Who are you and what is your business?

Ed Evans, CEO of Consumer Cellular. I joined the wireless industry in 1986. It's been an amazing ride. In the beginning, there was no text messaging, just plain old voice service and it was expensive. I am very proud of what our industry has accomplished, and I am certain we are still only in the beginning.

What is your leadership style?

I firmly believe in truly understanding all aspects of the business. It's not about sitting in a boardroom; it's about diving headfirst into our daily operations. Part of my daily routine is monitoring sales and customer service calls into our call centers. I gain priceless insights into our customers' needs, their pain points, and the very challenges our employees face day in and day out. Understanding the difference between what you think is happening and what is actually happening is critical. You will hear things on phone calls you don't like. Sometimes we don't get it right. These are great opportunities to correct course. Post-Covid as international travel really opened up, we were hearing from some customers that we weren't providing a great experience

when they traveled abroad. Based on those calls, we set up a focused team of experts dedicated to making international roaming go smoother.

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Your business is nothing without the customer and their happiness. Being aware of your customer’s concerns and understanding the quality of your customer service ultimately allows you to stay in touch with the heart of the business. Everyone in the company must share this basic understanding.

How do you differentiate yourself in a crowded industry?

Our company is built on human connections. It’s why our call centers are all based in the US and our employees are incentivized to give customers the best possible experience. Sometimes that can be a quick answer to a billing question and other times it can be a 15-minute run-through of all of the best features of the Apple Watch. We recently began opening stores across the country (25 by the end of the year) to extend this high level of service face-to-face. Our stores aren’t just places to buy phones; they’re hubs of engagement where customers can interact with our knowledgeable staff, get personalized solutions, and even a free cup of coffee. Our core customer is 50+, they have more freedom than anyone else (no mortgage, kids in the house, etc.) and we are a company that understands these needs – so we do everything possible to make communication and technology easy for them.

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What is your biggest piece of advice to entrepreneurs?

Employees are your greatest assets. That’s why one of our core values is Happy Employees Make Happy Customers. It’s vital to recognize and reward their hard work. We’ve partnered with the

University of Arizona Global Campus to offer all our employees the ability to earn a tuition-free degree.

When your employees are content and motivated, they naturally deliver top-notch service to your customers. It’s a simple equation: happy and motivated employees equal satisfied and loyal customers.

I would also stress the importance of partnerships. Our partnerships with organizations like AARP and USAA are built on shared values and missions. We’re not just shaking hands for the sake of it; we align our research and resources with these partners to better understand our customers. Teaming up with like-minded individuals and companies builds trust within the industry and resonates with your audience. It’s a win-win for everyone involved.

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Have any mentors had a big effect on your career?

I have been fortunate to have had great mentors in my 35-plus years in the wireless industry. I learned from the late Stan Sigman, AT&T Wireless CEO, to “inspect what you expect”. Denny Strigel, Verizon CEO, was a great influence on my management style. Denny set very clear expectations and held people accountable. I worked directly for Odie Donald, BellSouth Mobility CEO, and learned the importance of diversity and people skills. Odie was the best I have seen at motivating people.

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