

Sales newbies, don't fret—just go above and beyond

August 22 2017



"We're not saying you have to go out and hug your customer," said Stephanie Mangus, assistant professor of marketing at Michigan State University. "All we're saying is that you should take action on that emotion in a positive way, to put that emotion into practice." Credit: Michigan State University

Good news for novice salespeople worried about becoming successful:

Expressing your gratitude to customers by going above and beyond your job description may be as effective as developing long-term relationships with them, indicates a first-of-its-kind study.

The scientific investigation into both customer and salesperson gratitude, led by Michigan State University business scholar Stephanie Mangus, is particularly relevant as Millennials enter the workforce and become major consumers. Substantial evidence shows that Millennials, or those born between about 1980 and 2000, are emotionally driven buyers.

Salespeople who control the emotional tone of their buyer-seller relationship tend to have an upper hand, Mangus said. And one way of controlling that [emotional tone](#) is for salespeople to express their gratitude to the customer in positive ways, which in turn can foster customer gratitude and loyalty.

"We're not saying you have to go out and hug your customer," said Mangus, an assistant professor of marketing and an expert in business relationships. "All we're saying is that you should take action on that emotion in a positive way, to put that emotion into practice. Maybe that's one extra phone call to share a piece of information with your customer, or maybe that's one extra call to the service department to make sure that customer doesn't fall to the end of the list."

Mangus and colleagues studied salesperson and customer surveys in a business-to-business setting from a large transportation logistics firm. The study found that when salespeople did not go above and beyond, customer gratitude was low overall - and even lower in new relationships between salesperson and client (compared with long-term relationships).

But when the salesperson did go above and beyond by expressing their gratitude through action, which the researchers call "extra-role behaviors," customer gratitude shot up to the same high level for both

new and long-term relationships.

"There's a general acceptance that the longer you've been in a business relationship, the more loyal that customer is to you and the more they're going to buy from you," Mangus said. "But what we found is that extra-role behaviors can sometimes take the place of that. So if you're going above and beyond, it may not matter that it's a newer or developing relationship."

And that's great news for new and aspiring salespeople.

"One of the big fears of our sales students is that, 'Oh man, sales jobs are scary because I'm going to go out there and not have customers and not be able to make any money," Mangus said. "But what new [salespeople](#) have is excitement, energy and passion to prove themselves. So if they are grateful for someone just willing to let them come in the door, and they engage in these extra-role behaviors, they can potentially get over the fact that they haven't been a [salesperson](#) for 20 years and that they don't have an ongoing relationship with this customer."

The study is published in the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*. Co-authors are Dora Bock from Auburn University, Eli Jones from Texas A&M and Judith Anne Garretson Folsie from Louisiana State University.

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Sales newbies, don't fret—just go above and beyond (2017, August 22) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-sales-newbies-dont-fretjust.html>

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