

Pleasant surprises are the best customer service

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

On the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, I received an email from a customer asking if we could ship out a monogrammed writing portfolio for a last minute thank you gift for the officiator of his wedding.

Most companies may think it is more than good enough just to answer the email on that Sunday. Some may think that answering the email and actually being able to fulfill the customer's request may be good enough. And finally a select few may think that answering the email, fulfilling the customer's request and throwing in a "congratulations on your forthcoming nuptials" is outstanding, if not above-and-beyond, customer service.

Not at ROYCE.

You'd be hard pressed to find a company without a mission statement that fails to reaffirm customer centricity as one of their guiding principles. And much like their "commitment to sustainability" which they throw in their as well because it sounds like the right thing to say in the year 2016, it does not necessarily mean there is not a vast disparity between theory and practice.

I have always admired Zappos' ability to manifest their customer service based brand values into reality on a consistent basis for myriad years now. Tony Hsieh redefined the gold standard for what it means to put the customer first, in fact, his outlook on customer happiness being the function of connectedness, is the basis for my approach to customer service. We at ROYCE, like every other leather accessories brand in our space, are competing fiercely for market share and it goes without saying that we want as many customers as possible.

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That being said, we want to know who our customer is, not for some market research and segmentation means, but because we actually want to know who Terry, the recent college graduate from Rutgers about to do his first round of Wall Street interviews and in need of a professional looking messenger bag, is. Or Alexandra, who just gave birth to her second daughter and wanted a monogrammed picture frame to commemorate it. Depth of relationship -- no, friendship-- is more important to us at ROYCE than merely acquiring another customer. Like a conscientious good friend, our customer service team (myself included, because everyone at ROYCE is customer service, whether you are a monogrammer or warehouse employee or even accountant!) wants to anticipate your gifting needs quite possibly before you do.

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Going the extra mile does not mean next day delivery in the U. S. or same day delivery in Manhattan. Or free returns. Or free monogramming. Those should be the minimum case scenario, not something that should be applauded. Rather, we need to understand the context of our customers.

Where are they in life? And where are they going? Might Terry need a business card case to store his fresh out of the box Deloitte cards (we actually did follow up to ensure he got the job)? Or will Alexandra need a lightweight diaper bag for all of little Mackenzie's odds and ends?

Brands must stop looking at customers through the lens of “ how do we fulfill customer number 103-245238-2-439’s order as efficiently as possible?”.

Instead, it is imperative that we take it a further by thinking about who they are, why they came to us in the first place, and how, like any reliable friend, can we be there again for them in the future.

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For Mike (the upcoming groom), our offices are not open on Labor Day but as soon as we opened up the shop the day after, his order was processed, monogrammed and shipped to arrive in his mailbox on Wednesday.

It wasn’t, however, what he ordered. In addition to the portfolio, we thought he and his lovely fiancé might like matching “ His” and “ Hers” luggage tags and RFID blocking passport jackets for that exciting honeymoon that’s right around the corner. Because when you treat your customer as your friend, you know what they need even if they don't ask.