

Practically applying the character quality of

hospitality

vs. Loneliness

"Cheerfully sharing food, shelter, or conversation to benefit others."

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In 850 B.C. the Greek poet Homer said, *"A guest remembers all his days the host who shows him kindness..."* Homer had it right, and his observation is still accurate almost 3000 years later. In fact, good hospitality may make an even greater impression now than it did long ago because, unfortunately, it has become much too rare.

Reducing customer disappearance

Before we talk about training ourselves to practically reintroduce hospitality into our behavior, I think it is important to remind ourselves of the financial value of hospitality. A recent study showed that, of all the customers that take their business elsewhere, 68% do so because of poor customer service. A spirit of hospitality must be at the heart of customer service for it to be successful. So, if we can grasp the concept of hospitality, we can begin to recognize new levels of customer retention.

Simple, like a box of chocolates

Here are a couple ideas on practical hospitality that aren't rocket science. First, in a business contact, whether on the phone, on e-mail, or in a letter, take time to show genuine interest in the individually on a personal level. You may interact with them socially, or you may be aware of activities in their life that are of interest to you both. Either way, look for opportunities to show genuine interest and, when appropriate, concern for the person. Watch out! Don't patronize. Insincerity can be heard on the phone or seen in print as clearly as if you were face to face. Brief, personal, sincere, relationship-building conversation during a business call is an art form that not many have mastered. But whether the

relationship is business or personal, it is this spirit of hospitality that will strengthen your future with that individual.

Next, let's talk about applying the Scout motto: "BE PREPARED." As this month's Character First Character Bulletin observed, you can't be prepared for every customer that crosses your path. Many company waiting rooms are set up to provide hospitality to customers. Receptionists are trained to be hospitable to prospective customers when they first call the company. However, there will

Commitment to Hospitality

- I will welcome visitors
- I will gladly share my things
- I will make others feel important
- I will prepare for guests

always be those who make it to your office or to your area of work without being "hospitalitized" by the standard company setup. No matter your place in the organization, you are still responsible to show hospitality. That is why the balancing quality of orderliness is so important. When opportunity sneaks up on you, you don't want to have to clear files off the seating area and throw away yesterday's burger sack from off your desk. Good order facilitates the transition from the middle of a project to a hospitable welcome.

Living hospitality

Hospitality is fast becoming a lost art in our social lives. After-hours events with friends occur at entertainment venues instead of in our homes. However, opening our homes requires a true spirit of hospitality because *it takes work*. I have some friends who moved into a new home in December of 2001. In just a few months I had been invited to their home for a New Year's party, and Super Bowl party, and an open house. The first event took place even before they had all their furniture. Their desire was to open their *home*, not just to show off their *house*. They understood the true meaning of hospitality.

How many "conversations" have you heard in which the conversants just take turns talking about themselves? I called an acquaintance of mine shortly after my wedding for some information, and all this person did was talk about their life. This individual didn't ask me once about my wedding, my honeymoon, anything. They consider me a friend, yet I constantly wonder if they have any true interest in my life. Hospitality is based on seeking the benefit of another. When we show interest in another and humbly wait to be asked about ourself, we will be on the road to understanding hospitality.

How HOSPITABLE are you?

- On a scale of 1-10 how hospitable is your receptionist?
- Is your place of work "organized for hospitality?"
- During conversation, do you focus on yourself and your interests or on the person you are conversing with?
- Have you taught your family to practice proper etiquette at home, even when you don't have visitors?!
- When you invite others into your home, is your goal their comfort, or just to impress them with your home?