

WHO'S YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CUSTOMER?

by Will Marre

TO FORGE BETTER CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS, CONSIDER WHAT MAKES YOUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WORK.

We are all vulnerable to the vitality of “customer” relationships. In business, they leave us economically vulnerable. But we are even more fragile in our private lives. Our mental, emotional and spiritual sense of well-being is deeply tied to the quality of our personal relationships. After all, our loved ones are “consumers” of us — our thoughts, moods, values, interests and personality. And each day they, these loved ones, vote their feelings by the quality and level of intimacy of attention they give us.

Chad and Carole are two of my clients who are senior executives for the same high-pressure company. They have also been a married couple for more than 10 years. When I first started working with Chad, I couldn't help noticing his enthusiasm when he talked about his wife. He was wild about her in every way. He thought she was a brilliant executive — creative, compelling, efficient. On a personal level, the raves were even sweeter. He called her an amazing wife and a gifted mother.

Carole spoke about Chad as if he were a god: the most brilliant, visionary leader she had ever seen. A sensitive husband and loving father. She freely used words like “adore” and “admire” in describing Chad, and she meant it. To hear two people talk about each other with such affection and idealism is exceedingly rare. For husbands and wives in business together, it is virtually unheard of.

BUILDING THE PILLARS

As I continued to work with Chad and Carole, I discovered two things. One, they consciously focus on the quality of their relationship and use something called Active Advocacy. That is, they are each other's biggest fan, and they aren't shy about making that known. Second, they spend time together. Whenever they aren't working, they are together, and they invest at least an hour a day in nothing but personal communication with each other.

So what's up with Chad and Carole? Are they just obnoxiously lucky? Well

maybe, but their relationship is built on pillars anyone can employ to change the energy of their relationships. There are three main things we can do to create better primary relationships. I call them the Three Pillars of Love:

- 1. Understand**
- 2. Involve**
- 3. Affirm**

UNDERSTANDING

The prime need of a human being in a relationship is to be understood, and we can only provide understanding when we value others intrinsically. This means we don't value them for how they please, fulfill, serve or satisfy us, but for who they are in and of themselves. We don't appreciate their good qualities alone; it's the whole package. We treasure their extraordinary gifts and the quirks that others may find annoying. We taste the spice that makes their entire dish unique.

Only when we value another intrinsically can empathy flow.

Conversation is vital to understanding. Couples who are romantic talk a lot. Little conversations throughout the day. Other couples, on the contrary, seem to get their entire talking life “over with” when they’re falling in love. During those

hormone-enhanced early days, they lose track of time and talk all night. But lasting romance requires continued soul conversation. Without knowing the depth of our beloved, there is nothing real to love. All we see or hear is the superficial, the practical. We lose sight of the good stuff, the soul stuff.

INVOLVEMENT

A blissful relationship requires hands-on involvement. It is not enough to tolerate the interests of our loved ones. It isn’t even enough to support them. If we want love that lives and breathes, we must involve ourselves in their interests. At least some of the time. We don’t have to be involved in everything they do, but we should try to be involved in the special things. The things that appear to give them special satisfaction. That’s where the love payoff really resides.

AFFIRMATION

Affirming is simple. As soon as you notice someone doing something well, being kind or thoughtful, expressing his

or her gifts or simply looking good, you mention it the moment you think it. The habit of affirmation is one of the most powerful loving skills you can develop. Why we keep our positive thoughts a secret is a great mystery.

Dan Baker, director of the Life Enhancement Center at Canyon Ranch Resort in Tucson, Arizona, cites research confirming this. “When we affirm others, we use parts of our neo-cortex that generate positive moods. Affirming stimulates neurotransmitters that are mood elevators. Those who affirm and love others are making themselves happy.”

The lesson is simple. Want to feel better? Make someone else feel better.

Of course, the Three Pillars of Love aren’t limited to a spouse or romantic partner. Understanding, involving and affirming can improve the quality of any relationship — whether with children, parents, friends and even customers. This costs nothing, but the payoff is life’s jackpot.



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Marre recently received an Emmy Award® for his writing of the documentary, Reclaiming Your American Dream, aired on public television stations across the country. He is currently launching CitizenOne, an educational campaign designed to teach social entrepreneurship to high school and college students.

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