

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLIOM

# Customers for Life?

have a little exercise I'd like you to try. Close your eyes, and think of your five best customers. Got 'em? OK, now, when did you last see them or talk with them? I'm going to guess it was sometime recently. If you're pretty good at sales, you may very well know most of what they own, what they're thinking of buying next, their birthdays — maybe even the names of their bands, spouses and children.

What do these top clients think of you and your company? If you're like most sales folks, you are probably hard-wired to reason that they obviously love you since they buy so much. I'm guessing you feel quite certain that they're devoted to you and that you are their exclusive music store for life. After all, look at how much they've spent and how often they frequent your establishment.

This line of logic represents the salesperson in you selling yourself. Don't be fooled.

## RUDE AWAKENING

When I closed my retail store, I decided to conduct something of a lengthy postmortem to evaluate what I could have done better and what decisions might have led to a different outcome. I figured, if nothing else, these lessons would help me hone my business skills.

One of the things I did was review my company's top 200 clients and how recently they had shopped at my dealership.

You can imagine my shock when I discovered that 75 percent of them hadn't made a significant purchase in the past five years.

Admittedly, the stuff sold in our stores today often costs less than what we sold five years ago. That tends to skew the numbers, so older customers appear to have purchased more. But 75 percent! It was a rude awakening that demonstrated what a poor job I'd

done helping my staff nurture those all-important customer relationships.

Finding my own personal clients on the list also gave me the opportunity to study what I'd done wrong. Here's one case in point: I had a client who was a certifiable equipment junkie. If it was new, he had to have it. If it was cool, he wouldn't rest until it was in his rack. Over a period of about 10 years, he spent an obscene amount of money with me. He always followed my advice. That is until he stopped showing up.

If you'd asked me back then if I had a relationship with this person, I

would have certainly said "yes." In reality, there was no relationship, evidenced by his disappearance years ago and my failure to realize it. At best, I was his gear pimp.

## RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

Sales are based on relationships, and relationships should be two-sided affairs. Your clients, when treated well, will feel a natural affinity for you and the products or services you sell. You need to reciprocate by letting yourself become genuinely involved in those things that they hold dear. You need to gather reams of information that will help you in each successive conversation. And unless you have super-human recall, you need to develop a system to store and retrieve all the information you've gleaned.

In return, you'll receive their payments, loyalty and maybe even admiration. A relationship lasts as long as you continue to invest in it. As soon as you stop, it's in peril. No amount of previous effort will secure your most valued customers. The only way to do that is to earn their trust over and over again. It's this tireless and consistent effort that will earn you customers for life. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is managing director of Wechter Guitars. He's former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. E-mail him at gersonmusicinc@gmail.com.



**'Seventy-five percent of my top 200 customers hadn't made a significant purchase in the past five years.'**