

Caitlin Smith sits down with SKC's Director of Marketing, Karen Donaway to answer questions about her "obsession" with exceptional client service, the relationship between company culture and customer satisfaction and how to turn negative customer feedback into positive results.

Q

At SKC, you are known for being "obsessed with exceptional client service". What do you see as the top reasons it is important to SKC and small businesses in general?

CS: Exceptional client service is a natural way of life for me. It's important to listen and be responsive to your clients so that you can help them achieve their goals. And happy clients usually mean happy staff members – and that makes it easier overall to serve your clients and accomplish so much more. When we offer exceptional customer service, we are freeing up our clients' time and taking work off of them. This is true for any small business – provide outstanding service and create positive impact for your customers.

Q

Small businesses generally have less resources and smaller teams, and that means they have to be more creative in offering exceptional customer service. What are some creative measures you have implemented or have seen your clients implement?

CS: For me personally, I try to be as attentive as possible to my clients. Something as simple as bringing them coffee the way they like it, or sending a handwritten note goes a long way. They appreciate that and think of me as a teammate or partner in their business. I do everything I can to give them some free time back.

Some of my healthcare clients have gotten creative with making their patients' experience better. I have seen therapy pets brought in to reduce patients' anxiety which leads to a better experience overall. It's all about thinking outside the box and sharing good ideas.

Q

It's been said that it's much more expensive to acquire new customers than to keep existing ones. Would you agree with that statement? If so, what are some things small businesses can do to ensure customer retention?

CS: At SKC, our referral base is mostly our clients – and happy clients refer you to their colleagues, friends, and family. To ensure customer retention, small businesses need to show their customers attention. If appropriate, call to check in with them and get to know them personally. A relationship is much stronger than a business transaction. And sometimes a personal conversation leads into more ways to help your customers. I make a point to get to know my clients personally and let them know I genuinely want to help them. This is a much more resourceful way to grow your business than having to market and create lead generation. Those extra few minutes go a long way.

Q

What do you see as the relationship between company culture and customer satisfaction?

CS: Simply put, a positive company culture perpetuates good things! For a small business, the culture reflects in all you do. If you have happy employees, it shows in their work and their level of service to your customers. And it goes the other way too – if customers are happy, you generally have happy employees.

Q

It's important to ask for and get feedback from your customers, but sometimes it will be negative feedback. How can businesses turn negative feedback into a positive result?

CS: I firmly believe in open communication with my clients. Even if its negative feedback, my team needs to hear it so we can find a way to address it and move forward. Oftentimes negative feedback comes when a business is inflexible with the services they are providing. But what works for one client may not necessarily work for another. Ask questions so you can learn more about your client's business – and be flexible in your service offerings. Customize your services to what they actually need and you can turn negative feedback into a positive result.

