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**JoAnna Brandi**

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## Meet Customers' Needs by Meeting Your Own

JoAnna Brandi is President of Working Relationships/Integrated Marketing Systems. She began her career in relationship marketing seventeen years ago when she joined CMP Publications, Inc., a major trade publisher. From there she went on to develop the multimillion dollar Direct Marketing Services profit center. She left CMP in 1989 to form Integrated Marketing Systems, Inc. Ms. Brandi has spoken for many industry groups such as the American Marketing Association, the Direct Marketing Association, the Business-to-Business Council, the American Telemarketing Association, the National Center for Database Marketing, and others. JoAnna is a regular columnist for many trade journals and has had numerous articles published in journals such as *Direct*, *Database Advisor*, *Impact Advertising*, and *DMNews*. She is the author of a book on customer and employee relationships and a series of books entitled *Winning by the Numbers*.



### **ABSTRACT**

Charter Senior Fellow JoAnna Brandi suggests ways to improve business relationships. First, recognize with whom you have relationships, such as yourself! Your attitude and outlook affect your business performance. Also, be aware of the image you create in the eyes of others with your letters and faxes.

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## Introduction

Just as important as external and internal customer relationships is your relationship with yourself. "Your whole business is sitting on a three-legged stool," says JoAnna Brandi, author of *Winning at Customer Retention*, "and each leg represents a different set of relationships."

"The first leg is external relationships - your relationship with customers, suppliers, stockholders, families of employees, and the community. The second leg is internal relationships - employee to employee or employee to boss. The third leg, and the one to which traditionally we have not paid much attention, is your relationship with yourself. How you communicate with yourself has everything to do with how satisfied your customers are."

JoAnna has been a speaker, writer, consultant, and customer service "relationship marketer" for more than 17 years. She offers these suggestions for improving your business relationship with yourself.

## Find the Filter

"Just as you can put different filters on a camera lens, you can put different filters on your outlook," says JoAnna. "The next time you're dealing with a 'difficult' customer, ask yourself these three questions":

1. Am I seeing this customer through the filter of a bad mood, getting stuck in traffic, or a disagreement I had with a co-worker?
2. What is the positive intention of this customer?
3. Am I allowing past negative experiences with this person to color my relationship with him now?

"If you can find out what filter you have on, it can be a huge help in intercepting defensive behavior and reducing your level of frustration," JoAnna adds.

Listen for negative self-talk. Listen to yourself just as carefully as you listen to your customers or co-workers: are you focusing on the negative? Do you ever hear yourself saying "I can't do it," or "I'm so stupid," or "It's not my responsibility"? Do you come to work saying "I hate this job"? If so, ask yourself these questions:

1. What about this situation makes me feel this way?
2. What do I need to do differently to change the way I feel?

"If you see yourself negatively, you'll fulfill that vision of yourself," says JoAnna. "I conduct exercises with people where I have them push against my hand while they repeat 'I am strong,' and they are strong, then I have them push against my hand while they repeat, 'I am weak,' and 99% of them do grow weaker. The power of self-talk is incredible."

Set personal goals along with business goals, "When you set departmental goals, be sure to incorporate your personal goals into that vision," suggests JoAnna.

For example, if you feel insecure about public speaking at work, perhaps a drama course at a local college, or involvement in a community theater group could help hone those skills in an enjoyable way. Or you may feel that your teamwork skills could stand some brushing up. Why not start a company softball team as a fun way to enhance those skills. JoAnna says it's important to follow the "SMART" rule when setting goals; they should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based.

"As you see yourself achieving your goals, particularly when your business and personal goals are tied," JoAnna explains, "your attitude toward yourself is going to become increasingly positive, and customers benefit from that."

## **FAXES AND LETTERS AFFECT YOUR IMAGE**

Every contact you have with a customer helps that person form an impression of your organization. Your written communications can boost your professional image when you pay attention to details.

Take a hard look at the quality of the copies you send out. Does the copier need cleaning or maintenance? Is the copy lined up properly on the page? Is it clear and dark enough to read? Are all the pages there and in correct order?

Find out what your faxes look like to the customer by asking a customer to return a fax to you. How readable is the type? Do screened areas reproduce well? Is the image

sharp, clean and clear? Does the fax need cleaning or maintenance?

Format documents so they will fax quickly. Large areas of black will take a long time and tie up your customer's fax.

Check spelling and grammar in all written communications, including electronic mail. Pay particular attention to names and addresses.

Check standard forms for customer-friendliness. Try filling them out as if you were the customer.

Examine all correspondence carefully before sending it out and make sure it looks professional.