



New in the neighborhood

For more information on business openings and closings, see Patt Johnson's New in the Neighborhood column at DesMoinesRegister.com/business.



Rue 21, a junior apparel and accessories store, has opened at 1802 S.E. Delaware Ave., in Ankeny. The store opened in February and is one of three in the metro area.



Not an ordinary envelope salesman

Customer service must be the No. 1 priority no matter what type of business you're in

When I went into business many years ago, I told people I owned an envelope company. I had business cards printed that identified me as an "envelope salesman." I described myself as an entrepreneur.

All of those facts are still true, but incomplete. What I and our company really do is provide customer service.

Well sure, Harvey, you say. But isn't that just a part of the whole operation? Absolutely, positively, irrefutably, NO. I am in the service business, regardless of the product I make and sell. If my service is lacking, my business will be sent packing.

To validate my thinking, I recently visited with John Tschohl, president of the Service Quality Institute. John has spent 33 years focused on customer service. He has written hundreds of articles as well as seven books on the topic. He has been called the "guru of customer service" by USA Today, Time and Entrepreneur magazines.

Even the most successful companies are in constant competition for business. What sets them apart often boils down to one factor: outstanding customer service. John offered up some stellar advice for creating a service culture, no



HARVEY MACKAY is author of the New York Times No. 1 best-seller "Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive." He can be reached at harvey@mackay.com,

through his website at www.harveymackay.com or by writing him at MackayMitchell Envelope Co., 2100 Elm St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414. MackayMitchell's largest plant is in Mount Pleasant.

matter what business you're in.

First, you've got to understand you're in the service business. "Most companies think they are in manufacturing and retail; airlines don't know they are in the service business," he said. "Southwest Airlines is successful because they understand they're a customer service company — they just happen to be an airline."

Second, you have to look at all the policies, procedures and systems that you've got in place "that make life miserable for customers. You could have the nicest people in the world, but you could have stupid hours, stupid rules, stupid procedures, that just burn the customer." When you make it that difficult for customers to patronize you, they find someone else who is more

accommodating.

Third, you have to have empowerment. "Every single person has to be able to make fast decisions on the spot, and it better be in favor of the customer," John said.

Fourth, you have to be more careful about whom you hire. "The service leaders hire one person out of 50 interviewed, sometimes one out of 100, but they're very, very, very careful," he said. "Look for the cream, the A players, instead of bringing on B and C players."

Fifth, educate and train the entire staff on the art of customer service with something new and fresh every four to six months. "Let's say you want to create the service culture. No matter if you have a hundred or a thousand or a hundred thousand employees, you better have something new and fresh, so it's constantly in front of them," John said. "So when they wake up every day, and they go to work, they say, 'Fantastic, I'm taking care of customers!'"

Finally, measure the results financially so that you know the impact it's making on revenue, sales, profit and market share.

Everything you do, according to John, should be built around the concept of creating an incredible customer experience. He cites Amazon as one of his favorite role models. "At Amazon,

they've got technology, speed, price. They've got everything. If I'm on their website and I want them to call me, they're going to call me back in one second. That's speed. When you place an order, you can do it 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And 60 seconds later, you get a confirmation."

I realize Amazon is in a class by itself, and most businesses aren't ever going to achieve the growth or profits of that gargantuan company. But John's advice can be translated to companies of any size. A one-person shop can provide great service because they often have personal contact with their customers. Bigger companies have more resources available, which should enhance the service experience.

Perhaps the simplest way of creating a service culture is a variation of the golden rule: Treat your customers as you wish to be treated.

Make your customers excited that you're in business. Make them grateful that they have the opportunity to buy your services or products. Make them feel like they are your most important client. Make your service so outstanding that they wouldn't think of doing business with anyone else.

And then find a way to make your service even better!

Mackay's Moral: Customer service is not a department, it's everyone's job.