

Everybody Wants to Go Where Everybody Knows Their Name

Remember the theme song from the television show “Cheers?” “Everybody wants to go, where everybody knows their name.” Run that song through your head a few times, and you will see that it is a very true song. Think about places that you might frequent such as restaurants, stores, or bars, where they know your name. Are you more loyal to them than to businesses that don’t know you by name?

I joined Gold’s Gym about 10 years ago in order to get in shape. When I first walked into the gym, it was very intimidating. Most of the people I envisioned working out there were big muscle bound guys. When I walked in the door, there was a gentleman that sits behind the desk checking everyone in. When I walked in for the first time, he was greeting the members that he knew by name: “Hey Jim, Hi Bob, good to see you today Sally.” All of a sudden he sees me, and he says, “Hey, you, new guy, you need a card.” So, I walked over, he takes my picture, hands me a card and says, “I’m going to need to see your card everyday.”

The next day, I walked in the door, he’s saying hi to everybody by name again, “Hey Sam, Hi Troy, Hey Jim,” and then he sees me; “Hey, I need to see your card.” So, for three weeks, I was “Card Guy.” I could hear everybody else’s name being used, but he kept treating me like I was an alien. Three weeks and one day later I walked in the door, and like usual, the people in front of me were greeted by name; “Hi Bob, Hey Sue, Hey Jane.” Then much to my surprise, he looks up at me and says, “Hey Brad!” All of a sudden, I am one of the gang; this is my clan, these are my people, what a great place! I was no longer the alien.

Everyday as I walked in the gym door, he greeted me by name, so now other people are hearing my name as I walk in. I’m out on the gym floor working out with weights and people are walking by saying hello to me by name. What a wonderful feeling being part of a community! A couple years later, 24-hour fitness came to town and built a facility about one block away. They offered rates about half of what Gold’s Gym charged in order to take their business away. Did many of the regulars leave? No, because we had our emotional attachment to Gold’s Gym, where they know our name. Were we going to leave Gold’s and go back to becoming “Card Guy” in another place? Not on your life!

There are reasons, or should I say excuses, why some people don’t use the customer’s names. I think one of the biggest ones I have heard over the years is; some people don’t know whether to use the customer’s first name or their last name. There’s an unspoken rule that seems to work quite well; and that is if the customer is younger than you, you could use their first name, and if they’re older than you, you use their last name out of respect. But, there may be a circumstance where you can’t tell the person’s age. If you cannot tell which way to go, the absolutely safest thing you can do is use the customer’s last name. Whether they are 80 years old, or 8 years old, if you use their last name you’re going to have a satisfied customer. Especially the 8 year old who is now extremely happy with you.

If I walked in the door, you might address me as Mr. Worthley, so that’s pretty safe. But when a woman walks in the door, how do we address them if we don’t know whether they are married or not? The safest way to address women is “Ms”, such as; “It is good to see you Ms. Worthley.” In relations to this issue, I get asked all the time if it is OK to use “Ma’am,” and I would recommend against it as a general rule, unless you are in one of the southern states, where it is already part of the culture, and used respectfully.

Then there is the anxiety many people get when they have a customer with a difficult name to pronounce. You need to understand that everybody else is afraid of their name too and that is why these people never get to hear their names. The Smiths and the Jones of the world get to hear their name all the time. It’s still pretty powerful when they hear their name being used, but the people that have the difficult names are the ones that get the most out of hearing it. Whenever you see a name that is very challenging to you, individualize and personalize that person’s service by reaching out and asking them the question; “May I ask how you pronounce your name?” Or, be completely honest by saying: “That is a name I have not seen before, can you help me pronounce it?” That is something that most people aren’t willing to do, and that would exceed most people’s expectations.