Keeping customers happy is essential to scaling a business. What does every successful business owner have in common? They are fanatically focused on taking care of their customers. They wake up every day with buyers on their minds. They think to themselves, “I must do everything in my power to keep my customers happy and buying often. I can’t lose them to a competitor.”

These alert entrepreneurs have worked long hours to win their customers’ hearts and minds and now labor every hour to retain and increase their buying activities. Without question, this attitude typifies the very best entrepreneurs.

Intelligent business builders view customers as the lifeblood of their businesses and greatly value loyal patrons. Entrepreneurs recognize that every dollar clients spend provides the revenue to cover expenses, produce a profit and keep them in business. They appreciate and respect the people who purchase their goods.

Wise managers understand the lifetime value of customer purchases. Dollars collected from clients on a regular basis become a reliable and continuous flow of cash that can be significant over time. Consider a family that buys pizza each week and does so over many years from the same store. What is this customer worth to a pizza shop owner? Plenty. In general terms, a frequent lover of cheese and pepperoni might spend well over $500 per year. Over several seasons, this equates to several thousand dollars. To keep these greenbacks rolling into the bank account, the pizza storeowner has a single focus—to encourage loyal patrons to continue buying over and over. How should he or she accomplish this task? By delivering real value to shoppers.

Keep in mind that every purchase involves several elements in the buying...
process. Consumers will always evaluate whether they have bought the best product at the right price with appropriate service, warranty and support. They are also inclined to ask themselves, “Did I have a pleasant buying experience?” When customers make a purchase, they logically and emotionally evaluate the value they receive from each of these elements. A merchant’s goal is to ensure that each element in the buying process receives the highest customer valuation to keep the consumer happy, satisfied, loyal and willing to make referrals. It is my belief that as customers, we will buy and buy again if we see and feel real value.

As a special note, I have found the most important element is the buying experience itself. I think of it as the human interaction that occurs between the buyer and the seller before, during and after the purchase. It might be described as the emotions we experience during the process. Are we treated fairly, honestly and kindly? Do we feel appreciated, valued, honored and respected? Or do we experience the opposite? Do we sense contempt, ill will and lack of attention? What vibes do we receive?

When I ask an audience of consumers about this critical element, nearly every person tells me they have all had very significant negative experiences while purchasing a product or service.

Few relate any positive encounters. Do these consumers want to return to these businesses? Their response is, “Absolutely not!” In sum, even if the product and price receive high marks, if the buying experience is sour, customers are reluctant to return for more punishment.

Consider two different national consumer companies: one that consistently receives wonderful reviews for superior products and service, and the other famously lost 800,000 customers. The first brand is Nordstrom. The other is Netflix.

Nordstrom is always ranked as one of the very best department stores in the country in terms of value to customers. Management believes in taking care of people throughout the buying experience. Need to return something that doesn’t fit or you dislike even after wearing it? No problem. Nordstrom will take it back, no questions asked. Are there friendly and attentive personnel to assist buyers? Absolutely. The mission and culture of the company is to appreciate and serve loyal patrons.

On the other hand, in 2011, movie aficionados who loved to watch Hollywood’s latest via the Internet, screamed from their rooftops as Netflix increased its monthly subscription price by 60%. “Where’s the love?” they cried. Management did not address the price increase with consumers in a thoughtful manner and thousands of customers felt betrayed.

There are powerful and profound lessons we can learn from the behavior of both companies. In my view, the customer is always king.

In conclusion, keep in mind that savvy entrepreneurs keep customers happy and returning for more by delivering exceptional products and great service. If you are running a business today, you might ask yourself this question: “How would shoppers rate my buying process?”

Hopefully, you know their response. The answer, of course, comes from talking to customers. Consumers will honestly tell you without hesitation what they think and how they feel. Your job is to listen carefully and respond
quickly to improve the overall buying experience.

_This column includes excerpts from my newest eBook, The Characteristics of a Successful Entrepreneur, which is premiering on Amazon this week._

This article is available online at: