

# IMPACT



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## Extension Provides Training Opportunities for Small Business Owners and Employees

### *The Situation*

Customer Service is an important tool that all businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations have to consider. With advances in technology, customers have choices; they can choose to go down the block, across town, or on the Internet to get the product or service they are wanting. For a small business owner this can be detrimental, and the only way they can compete is through the quality of service they provide.

The options for training employees on customer service are plentiful if a company has the desire. It can cost hundreds of dollars to have a professional company train employees. One option is to train employees with a series of videos or DVD's, and hope that your employees learn and retain information using this method. Many employees do not receive the benefit of customer service training because of either time or money issues. Companies that deliver high quality customer service are more likely to make a lasting impression with their customers.

### *Our Response*

University of Idaho Extension Faculty started offering customer service programs as a result of requests from businesses, Chamber of Commerce and schools in Burley, Jerome, Twin Falls, Buhl, and Challis, Idaho. Through this partnership, we have presented 13 workshops with over 300 participants attending.

The curriculum used was adapted from Oklahoma State University "Oklahoma Pride." The updated and rewritten version of this is called "The Gold Standard of Public Relations." Two videos on customer service are used as supplements to this curriculum.

The workshops range from 30 minutes to 2 hours and cover the importance of customer service.

Through these programs we hope to:

- enhance the quality of customer service employees provide
- develop an understanding of what quality service is
- have an understanding of how to handle difficult customers or customer complaints
- help managers and owners support employees in their customer service endeavors

### *Program Outcomes*

Since November of 2005, Extension Educators in District III have delivered 13 customer service workshops to over 300 participants. As a result of these workshops, other community businesses and organizations have learned about the ability of the University of Idaho Extension to conduct customer service programs.

Participant's evaluations indicated they would:

- emphasize teamwork
- recognize that all employees should be familiar with all aspects of the business
- remember to understand what "our boss" the customer needs/expects

- recognize that positive attitude is important to make customers feel more satisfied with their experiences
- greet customers as soon as possible
- listen to the customers
- make a positive last impression
- be clear about company policies

### **The Future**

We will continue to offer this program to businesses as they request it. In the spring of 2006 we pilot tested a program to deliver to the high schools and we continue to work on refining that program. A section of the curriculum will be geared specifically toward high school students. As an extension of this program, we have been asked by the South Central Idaho Tourism and Recreation Association to help them develop a familiarization program for portal businesses. This will help their employees give proper information to travelers and hopefully keep them in the area longer.

### ***For More Information***

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