



Home Address

Building Better Service

Orientation Fine Points

Part I: Notice Unnoticed Negatives & Set Them Right

The homeowner orientation is one of the most critical elements of your customer loyalty efforts. While most companies understand this, they can easily overlook details that affect success. Several examples follow to illustrate some of the subtleties that can take orientation skills—and customer satisfaction—to a new level.

Listen to Your Words

Without intending to do so, many orientation reps deliver unintended messages with the words they use in discussing the home.

One of the most common examples of this is aligning the home buyers' expectations about year-end drywall repairs: "Unfortunately, we do not paint these repairs; you have to do that yourself." This is technically accurate (in most companies), but somewhat unfriendly. The "unfortunately" draws attention to negativity and can even imply that the speaker disapproves of this policy.

Instead, after describing year-end drywall service, conclude matter-of-factly with "Once we've completed the drywall touch up work you can use the paint samples we left you to paint them." An apology is unnecessary.

Another example occurs when appliance manufacturer warranties are mentioned. The typical speech includes "If you have a problem with any of the appliances, contact the manufacturer directly. We don't warranty appliances." More technical accuracy but again, unnecessarily negative. Compare that statement with this one—

The manufacturers of kitchen appliances have asked to work directly with you if any repairs are needed for their products. They may be able to resolve the issue by talking with you by phone and if they cannot, they prefer to set an appointment directly with you.

Customer service phone numbers are listed in the use and care materials for each appliance. They'll ask for the model and serial number of the item and the closing date on your home. A form is included at the end of your homeowner guide [open your copy and show them] so you can record these details for future reference. Please alert us as well so that we can follow up with you. Keep in mind, too, that appliance warranties are generally for one year but can be longer. The literature provided by the manufacturer will give you complete information.

Items Noted ... and More

Often a straight forward "We'll take care of this" as you note an item is sufficient. Leave out the editorial remarks such as "Someone got sloppy with the grout work."

Here's another example. An orientation rep knelt on the floor in the hallway and pressed the carpet in the linen closet, commenting "Sometimes they [the carpet installers who clearly cannot be trusted] cut a corner and leave the pad out in closets". While this may make the orientation rep look clever and hip to trades' tricks, it damages trust and confidence in the quality of the home. If the carpet installers cut corners, what about the framers, the plumber, the painter...?

At another orientation, the tour progressed to the master bath having found few items to note up to that point. The home buyer called attention to something that had been splashed on the shower enclosure trim. Hoping to keep the short list short, the orientation rep licked his finger and rubbed the trim to remove the spot. Although successful, the method was, to say the least, a bit offensive. (So now our seminar on orientations includes a suggestion to avoid licking your finger and wiping *any spots off of anything* in the new home—never say you've seen it all.)

Know What's Next

The closing appointment can be intimidating to home buyers—especially first time buyers. By being familiar with company practices, locations, time frames, and necessary preparation, orientation reps can ease tension and provide real guidance to customers.

Review the homeowner guide entry regarding the closing process. Ask whether a letter is sent as is often the case and if so read a copy. Typical reminders include utility transfer, arranging for homeowner's insurance, confirming that all financing details have been addressed, and obtaining the final payment in the form of a cashier's check. Where does the closing take place (and what driving directions would a newcomer to the area need?). How long does it usually take? Who should the home buyers contact if they are facing any kind of an issue that might interfere with the process? Carry some of that individual's business cards.

Consider how much more effective this background can be in helping customers. When real knowledge replaces "Well, by now you should have been notified..." which suggests that someone hasn't been doing his or her job and fails to help the buyers.

By watching and listening you may discover other examples of negatives that, once noticed, are easy to neutralize or even turn into positives. Given the value of the homeowner orientation, this effort to fine tune details will generate big returns—both in terms of your self-confidence and customer satisfaction.

The Book Shelf



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Still searching for an answer to the question *How do I get more done in a day and still have a life?* **The Power of Full Engagement** by Jim Loehr & Tony Schwartz may put you on the right track.

This seminal work about life management outlines how to establish a rhythm in your day to nurture four kinds of energy: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. These authors write convincingly about the need to *alternate periods of concentrated work with renewal*, training like athletes to strengthen—in our case—productivity muscles.

The time period they suggest we use is between 90 and 120 minutes; then take a break or change to a completely different activity. Switching back and forth in this manner allows you to concentrate on the task at hand, make impressive progress with it, then renew by shifting gears.

And the best part is that this system works just as they describe it.

Furthermore, pointing out that physical strength is the foundation for other energies, they make a powerful case for regular and vigorous exercise. If the exercise habit has eluded you, the prospect that we you can get more done with less stress during the work day *and* have energy left for a personal life may provide that just right incentive to get you moving.

Another powerful and practical concept they discuss is that of managing the *rituals* in your life—habits designed for a specific purpose. The strategy behind this suggestion is that because will-power and self-control are in short supply—we each have a limited amount each day—having systems that occur as if on auto-pilot can give us new power. Just becoming aware of your habits, starting to notice which ones serve you and where you need to develop new ones is a huge step forward in gaining control of your day.

At under \$11 for the paperback version or \$12.99 on Kindle, this treasure is a real value. If you are looking for time/work/life management inspiration, here's one place to find it.