

Praise for Cindy Solomon

“Cindy Solomon has been a gift to our organization and our customers. She has reenergized our organization's focus on exceptional guest service and leadership. Her real world knowledge, humor and passion were just what we needed.”

— HEATHER YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES,
TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF

“Cindy is wise, funny, entertaining, inspiring and profoundly understanding of issues that face professionals who are trying to keep many balls in the air.”

— ANN MESSENGER
PRESIDENT, MESSENGER ASSOCIATES, INC.

“Cindy's program on customer service leadership is exceptional. The content Cindy shared was surpassed only by her style and talent as a speaker. She is smart, dynamic, entertaining, and engaging. I look forward to my next opportunity to participate in one of her programs.”

— MARIE D. DISANTE
MANAGING PARTNER, CARLTON DISANTE & FREUDENBERGER LLP

“Cindy, you are the “bomb”!! Everybody loved your presentation! Your refreshing topic on the challenges we face and mustering the courage to make change was right on target both professionally and personally for the audience. Your humorous delivery energized and motivated everyone.”

— STEVEN JACKSON
DIRECTOR, CAREER DEVELOPMENT/ROP,
SONOMA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

“Cindy spoke for the second year in a row at our WISE Conference. She is the dynamite that hits the stage each year and sets the place on fire! Our audience of close to 1,000 women waits on her every word, every year. Cindy “gets” the reason any good business person is in business—for the love of the customer!”

— JOANNE LENWEAVER
DIRECTOR, WISE CENTER, WHITMAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

“This was the most motivational presentation I have ever seen in 20 years at my company. Cindy helped motivate me to do things differently for myself, my company and my customers.”

— ATTENDEE, ELI LILLY NATIONAL MEDICAL INFORMATION
CONFERENCE

The **RULES**
of *WOO*

An Entrepreneur's Guide to
Capturing the Hearts & Minds of
Today's Customers™

Cindy Solomon



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*For Beth and Emma who help me
reach for success every day.*

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Foreword



KeyBank® has been lending to a broad range of businesses for quite some time. In 2005, we launched Key4Women® to provide increased focus on women entrepreneurs with access to capital, financial solutions, educational offerings, and networking opportunities. In my role as Director of Client Experience, Community Banking CAO and founder of the Key4Women program, I spend a great deal of time seeking out new ways to provide support and inspiration for its members. When I heard Cindy's message I knew her ideas and advice needed to be shared ... not just with our members but also with every other entrepreneur or businessperson who would listen.

If you own a company, want to own a company, or work inside of a company that interacts with customers, you owe it to yourself to read this book. Cindy's confident, straightforward style, hilarious insights and probing questions will provide you with the information and momentum you need to attract and keep a solid base of loyal customers. Whether you've been in business for years or are just starting out, you'll appreciate her salient

advice on laying a firm foundation with your strengths, engaging with the employees and customers that are right for your business, and fortifying those relationships with sincerity and consistency.

These pages are loaded with provocative questions that force you to see the world from three distinct perspectives—that of a customer, of an entrepreneur, and an employee. This 360-degree view provides you with a clear and unobstructed path to building lasting relationships for your business. By showing how today’s most forward-thinking companies are addressing the challenges of ever-changing customer demands, Cindy compels you to reach beyond the success you have already created to a whole new level of profitability and stability.

From the very first page, I found myself nodding my head in agreement and laughing out loud at her poignant, real-life examples. The seven rules outlined in this book should be rules of thumb for every entrepreneur at every stage of growth. They should drive the business decisions you make every day.

If you want yours to be a business that is defined not simply by how many customers you gain but by how many you keep as raving fans—this is the book for you. Enjoy!

Maria Coyne
Chief Administrative Officer
Director of Client Experience
KeyBank
March 2010

Author's Note



I grew up hearing about entrepreneurs. My father worked for the one he thought was the most impressive of all. Mr. Paul Seifert. Mr. Seifert (as we were taught to call him) owned one of the largest automobile dealerships in the West. He was not only wildly successful in the 1950s automotive market but also incredibly well known in his community for his generous contributions and fundraising. Mr. Seifert was, in my father's eyes, the best example of a businessperson that you could find. Not only was he successful but he also looked out for others, including my father.

Family lore has it that my father started working for Mr. Seifert as a shag boy—cleaning cars and moving them around on the lot. Through pure hard work and street smarts he eventually worked his way up to become president of Seifert Pontiac. Family lore being what it is, I would guess that most of this story is true but parts have been embellished over the years. The most important embellishment, in my mind, is that it *only* takes hard work to become a great entrepreneur. If that were really true, a lot more people would make it to the top.

Of course nothing in life is that simple. Today, creating a successful business requires much more than elbow grease. Certainly it takes a belief in your product or service. A belief in the people with whom you surround yourself. And a belief in your ability to defy the odds. But it also requires you to be skilled at choosing the right priorities and, perhaps most importantly, it requires you to have the courage to become involved in the lives of the people you depend on most for your livelihood, your customers and your employees.

That's what this book is all about. I used to joke that I wanted to become the speaker and consultant I wish I could have hired when I started out. This is the book I wish I could have read when I first started my company. It's a guide that, I hope, will help you build rewarding partnerships with the customers who suit your business best and enable you to achieve the success you so richly deserve.

Introduction: Why We Must Woo



For over 35 years I have worked around the country and across industries. I have worked inside Fortune 100 companies as a top executive. And I have run my own business for nearly two decades. I have guided teams of thousands and teams of one. I have worked with exceptional leaders who create amazing cultures and others who destroy them. I have witnessed the emergence of passionate entrepreneurs who go on to great heights and have observed the agony of the end of entrepreneurial dreams.

I have watched as technology has given birth to a new world order ... in our lives, in our businesses and in our communities. I have ridden the information wave and fought to digest its data at ever increasing rates. I have managed businesses through economic downturns, terrorist attacks and more client changes than I care to remember. I have celebrated extraordinary wins with my team and sacrificed countless hours of sleep over the losses.

Yet through it all one thing has always remained true. No matter what you sell, who you sell it to, what

industry you are in, what size your company is, or how long you have been in business—your success relies on one insistent, demanding, delightful, pernicious, exciting, terrifying, unfathomable and uncontrollable constant: your customers. It is on your customers' shoulders that your success as an entrepreneur rests. And yet, as I look across the hundreds of organizations with whom I have worked as well as the thousands of businesses I have dealt with as a customer, I am constantly stunned by the sheer number of those who *talk* about customers being important and yet their everyday actions show those same customers ... how *unimportant* they really are.

Think of your latest bad customer service experience and you'll know exactly what I mean. Think of the last time you walked into your local drug store or tried to get a question answered by your insurance company. Did you feel valued? Taken care of? Even noticed? Because of what I do for a living, I ponder these questions daily and treat nearly every interaction I have with human beings and their technological surrogates as an opportunity to learn. I can tell you the news isn't good. Even during our latest economic meltdown, when you might imagine most companies would be paying particular attention to the details of serving and keeping their customers, it seems things just got worse. There are, of course, bright spots. A few companies are hitting the customer service ball out of the park daily. They are proving that service is not a *cost* of doing business but rather it is the engine that drives profitability, efficiencies and long-term business sustainability.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. But the one most responsive to change."

— Charles Darwin

Darwin's sentiment could not be truer for businesses today. As customers have become more demanding, more educated and are offered more choices than ever before, it has become incumbent upon us as business owners to not only find new and innovative ways to serve them but also to change the way we court them. To survive, we can no longer afford to simply sell to, serve or satisfy our customers. To emerge victorious from this latest evolution in our marketplace, we must become experts at *wooing* them. The good news is these same ruthlessly opinionated customers are quite willing to be wooed. In fact, they're demanding it. Today's customers are eager to put in the effort required to build lasting, mutually rewarding relationships with you—as long as you're willing to do your part too. These relationships, once forged, can be indefinitely rewarding for both parties. As we'll see in some of the examples in this book, investing your time and energy in properly wooing your customers can indeed bring you the success you seek—or at the very least it can make you fall in love with what you do all over again.

Imagine having relationships with your customers that are so secure that they are as invested in your success as you are. Imagine maintaining an ongoing dialogue with your customers about what you are doing well and what you aren't doing well—a conversation that provides you with the very information you need to create more

profitability from your relationships with them. Sounds like heaven doesn't it? Believe it or not, as an entrepreneur, you are more likely than most to be able to create this kind of relationship because your passion for your business is also a personal passion for you.

I first began thinking about the concept of wooing customers when I was still working on the other side of the table in corporate America. During this time I collected extensive experience working with customers in senior roles in sales and marketing. Even more enlightening was my work with one of the first database building companies in the country. It was during my time working with large corporations and helping them see the value of "getting to know" their customers that I began to see the vital importance of using that information to woo customers to a company ... not just for a one-time transaction, but forever.

The need for us to woo was crystallized for me when I read the industry-shaping book *The Loyalty Effect* by Frederick Reichheld in which he cited a statistic that holds true even today. It finally provided me with the statistical evidence of what I had believed and taught throughout my corporate career. Reichheld interviewed thousands of customers who left or defected from a product or service to go to a similar product or service. He found that 80 percent of these customers who left were actually "satisfied" with their experience.¹ That's right, up to 80 percent of the customers who leave you and go to your competition are actually "satisfied." That means that in order to woo customers to stay with you forever

you have to create more than mere satisfaction. You have to find a way to build a relationship that goes far beyond the transaction. To develop a trusting, proactive, profitable and mutually beneficial partnership, you have to make it *personal*.

This book isn't a typical business book. As a matter of fact it probably breaks all the business book rules. My intention is to provide you with examples, ideas and strategies to help you focus your business on providing the right customers with the right experiences to create the right growth for your company. To offer different perspectives and points of view that will allow you to focus on the priorities that will build your profitability and success. I've used examples from all sizes of companies and from a range of industries. I've tried to provide you with the customer's perspective as much as possible to help you apply these same principles to your business. Whenever you come across a "Put Your Customer Hat On" box, I encourage you to take the time to think about the questions posed there. Doing so will help you shorten the distance between your current practices and practices that work to woo your customers.

Some of the rules I mention here pertain to your business more than others but all are worth reading. This book isn't a checklist. Rather it is a series of questions that will help you uncover effective ways of wooing customers for your particular business. I hope you will find these questions worthy of pondering, sometimes challenging and often inspiring. Remember, to woo is a process. It's a pledge, a focus, a promise, a way of doing business and

a way of living your life. It is not only something you *should* do for your company and the people who depend on you for their livelihood, it is also a change you *must* be willing to make to ensure your success and survival.

RULE 1



Know Your Own Strength

"Success is achieved by development of our strengths,
not by elimination of our weaknesses."

— *Marilyn Vos Savant*

"Let the world know you as you are, not as you think
you should be, because sooner or later, if you are posing,
you will forget the pose, and then where are you?"

— *Fanny Brice*

I was one of those kids who grew quickly. Between the summer of my 11th and 12th years, in the span of only six months, I grew from a tall but not abnormal height of 5'2" to almost 6'0". Needless to say, my brain was challenged to keep up with all that extra body. Not a day, or sometimes an hour, went by without me falling over my own feet or bumping into furniture or walls that, just months earlier, had seemed so far away.

It was around this time I remember playing a typical game with my neighborhood pals. (Yes, this is back in the day when we ran around “unsupervised” all day long in the summer.) After a particularly challenging game of something akin to *running around in circles* I affectionately punched my friend Tim in the shoulder. I thought Tim was joking when he almost went down on one knee grabbing his shoulder as though I had hit him with a baseball bat.

No one was laughing, however, when our home phone (an avocado colored touch tone with a cord long enough to wrap around the entire house) rang and my mother’s face registered a look of consternation that was directed right at me. I frantically racked my brain trying to remember what I had done during our day of play that could have gotten me into trouble. After the call my mother sat me down and informed me that, as a result of my “playful punch,” my pal Tim had ended up with a bruise on his shoulder the size of a tomato and a mother who was looking for an apology. “You don’t know your own strength,” my mother said to me in a kind but stern tone as she tried to explain that one of the outcomes of my growth spurt was apparently a physical power that I needed to learn how to control. If I wanted to be successful in navigating the currents of my neighborhood gang, I was going to need to learn to use my newfound strength to garner favor and not fear. Once I understood the implications of my growth spurt, I began to learn how to employ my newfound strength to assist those around me. I reached things on high shelves. I hung banners for

the school dance. I carried heavy objects. And I provided a protective presence beside smaller friends who felt threatened by other kids.

So what does my growth spurt have to do with entrepreneurship you might ask? It taught me a valuable lesson that benefits me in my career and life to this day. I learned that understanding your true strengths and knowing how to wield them to produce the outcomes you want are essential to your success in business ... and in life. It is this same ability to understand and employ my strengths that has enabled me to successfully run a business through two economic downturns, a cross-country move and numerous client changes. As an entrepreneur, understanding *your* true strengths and the power they give you to woo your customer is the first step toward creating a resilient business that can not only grow steadily but also withstand the inevitable bumps and bruises every business sustains on the path to success.

Identify Your Abilities, Knowledge And Skills

So many business leaders tell me they have a passion for their products or an innate desire to provide service. While these are indeed attributes of any good entrepreneur they're not the *strengths* that make you uniquely qualified to win the hearts and minds of your customers. No company can successfully woo customers into long-term relationships with aspiration, passion and charisma alone. Only finding, nurturing and using your true strengths can create the loyalty you're after. So you've got a great idea, a great product, a new way of

providing a service. Maybe you're already successfully providing your products or services but are looking for a way to grow your business. Either way, you've made a decision to embark on an entrepreneurial journey. The first step in that journey is to uncover your strengths—those true differentiators that will set your business up for success and profitable growth.

Your true strengths are a combination of what you bring to the table naturally, what you have gained over the years through your experiences, and your ever-expanding knowledge base about your product and services. These three things combine to create the true strengths of your company. If pursued consciously, they also become your strategic and competitive differentiators.

I became an entrepreneur almost 20 years ago, after a very successful career in corporate America. When I set out on my own, I was crystal clear about my strengths and confident they would be of benefit to my potential clients. First, I had a natural ability (and love) of public speaking. I particularly enjoyed challenging the status quo from a large platform—the larger the audience and the more provocative the message, the better. This ability enabled me to challenge my audience to see their businesses, and the world, from a refreshing, new perspective. But I wasn't operating on public speaking chutzpah alone.

Thanks to a career stint in the country's first consumer database business, I had knowledge and insight into the attitudes and behaviors of consumers. I had seen firsthand how successful companies leveraged this

information to inspire true loyalty among their customers, allowing them to build their revenues and their profitability. And finally, I had the leadership expertise and a proficiency in business operations and finance that I acquired during my years running large organizations within corporate America. These skills helped me see the view from “the other side of the table” and enabled me to offer realistic solutions and real world experience to my clients’ business challenges.

The combination of these three attributes defined my company’s true strengths and therefore my competitive differentiators. Today, when I focus my resources on refining and cultivating my strengths, my business and my relationships with my customers grow right along with those strengths. Whenever I feel like I’m struggling—when my work seems to be harder than it should be or I’m not creating the outcomes I know I can for my customers—I invariably find that I have wandered from my strengths. Working harder doesn’t grow your business unless you are working harder at growing your areas of strength.

So what are the natural abilities you bring to *your* company? Are you a great salesperson, a great connector? Maybe you are awesome at the financials, problem solving, or finding technological solutions? What about your knowledge base? Your experiences? What differentiates you from others who do what you do? Once you can answer these questions quickly and with confidence you’ll begin to see a clearer path to successfully wooing loyal customers.

Stick With What You Do Best

Often it is your customers themselves who give you the first push down the slippery slope that leads you away from what you do best. “I know this isn’t exactly what you guys do,” they say, “but we like and trust you so much, we’d love to have you bid on it anyway.” Or better yet, a customer comes into your retail establishment asking for a product or service you don’t offer but “certainly could ... I mean ... how hard can it really be?”

Avoiding this temptation may seem counterintuitive at first. Many entrepreneurs have launched successful businesses that began with the phrase, “How hard can it really be?” But they weren’t necessarily successful because of their blind courage. Chances are, they were successful because the business idea played into their true strengths. Just as many others have had a go at something with the same spirit of adventure ... and failed miserably. What’s important to remember is that the moment you try to become something that doesn’t leverage your true strengths—the moment you try to become *everything* instead of *something* to your customer—is the moment you lose the focus you will need to grow a resilient business. In your desire to land the contract/get the customer/help a friend, you slowly but surely veer away from your company’s strengths.

It’s not always customers who lead you astray. When things are going swimmingly for your business it’s easy to start dreaming of possibilities ... big wondrous possibilities that lure you away from the very strengths that built the loyal customer base that’s feeding your current

success. How many times have you let yourself drift from your strengths only to be brought up short when you realized that doing so was costing you time, energy and valuable customers? In fact, there are numerous factors that can cause you to lose sight of your strengths and step off the path to success—a voracious new competitor, a shift in the economy, a cash flow crisis, and especially overconfidence that is fed by a high level of success. Small businesses and entrepreneurs aren't the only ones that can get caught in this trap. You could fill a book with examples of major multi-national corporations that have lost their competitive edge because they wandered from their original strengths.

When Your Focus Wanders—Toyota

Toyota's difficulty in 2010 with extensive recalls for defective accelerators and braking systems is a great example of a leadership team that lost touch with the strengths and characteristics that differentiated their company from the competition. In 2008, *Toyota's* uncompromising dedication to reliability, durability and quality propelled the company to a position as the world's largest automaker, ending a 77-year reign by *General Motors*. The ensuing enthusiasm and overconfidence that resulted from this designation drew *Toyota's* leaders away from the strengths that had earned them this honored position in the first place. Instead of maintaining their focus on consistency of design they brought in new suppliers to meet the increase in market demand and allowed those new suppliers to diverge from the company's strict design

consistency standards. They stopped leveraging their strengths for the benefit of their customers and shifted their efforts to maintaining their position as number one in the world.²

Without a keen focus on the company's original strengths *Toyota* began thinking like their competitors—the American car industry—and fell right into the substandard quality trap that was the Americans' undoing.³ If *Toyota's* leaders had simply maintained their focus, they might have avoided the damage to their reputation and created an even stronger position in the marketplace that could have increased consumer desire for their brand tenfold.

Keep Cultivating Your Strengths

Losing sight of your strengths isn't the only possible pitfall here. Failing to *grow* your strengths can cause trouble for your company, too. *Blockbuster*[®] is a great example of a company that didn't grow its strengths to keep pace with the marketplace. Their key differentiators were accessibility and uniformity. Sure, movie rental stores existed before *Blockbuster*. But they were all different. They carried different titles. They charged different fees. They had limited selections. And often times the video was damaged or unwatchable. *Blockbuster* brought it all together brilliantly under the universally recognizable big blue banner. They made renting a home movie a uniform process that we all could count on. And we were willing to put up with membership fees, commutes to the local store, and late fees just to be in on the action.

Even the folks at *Blockbuster* got comfortable. In 1999, despite the dramatic changes that were occurring in the marketplace, *Blockbuster* was so busy counting their money they stopped looking for ways to leverage their strengths. By this time, the Internet was changing the way we shopped and it certainly was changing our expectations with regard to time and convenience. A little startup called *Amazon*[®] was showing us that we could buy things from the convenience of our own homes and expect quick, easy delivery right to our doors. The convergence of these new customer expectations and a near universal unrest among customers regarding the perceived outrageous late fees charged by the now dominant *Blockbuster* created a hole in the marketplace that a man named Reed Hastings was all too happy to fill with a home movie rental concept he called *Netflix*[®]. Suddenly we didn't have to drive to a store. The DVDs came to us. We didn't have to pay late fees or watch movies on a schedule. We could keep a movie as long as we wanted. The selection was huge. And switching was easy.

Blockbuster didn't take action until four years—and millions of dollars in losses—later. Today, *Netflix* has solidified its position with 1.9 million DVDs delivered each day to over 10 million subscribers. They continue to

"Search companies, which I won't mention by name, tried to do so many things at the same time, they forgot all about search. They either missed the next revolution of search or they created an opening for a Google to enter."

— Eric Schmidt