The customer is the most important asset of any business and the most vital component of the sales process. It requires a great deal of effort and energy to get a new customer to walk in your door, so you always want to make the most of that opportunity.

Everyone has heard the saying, “The customer is always right.” And you know of situations when that didn’t really hold true. However, the basis of this philosophy is to encourage the right approach to customer service, allowing you to build relationships and create long-term clients.

Customer Service
Customer service is the most vital part of customer retention. It is about finding ways to address your customer’s needs and wants and focusing on the customer experience as opposed to customer exploitation.

Based on taking an interest in and caring about your customers in a genuine manner. Great customer service, on this level, is a powerful asset in any business and is very difficult for competitors to beat, even with price.

What makes this challenging is that each customer gauges customer service differently, so it’s up to you to know what your customer wants each and every time. A great way to start is by asking relevant questions at the beginning of your consultation.

Frame Design
Ultimately, customers should always feel that the final choice in frame design is theirs, not yours. However, some customers require guidance and advice to get to this point, even if they don’t think they need it.

Some customers have a definite vision of their...
framing requirements. At times, you may need to be diplomatic to ensure that your customer is ultimately satisfied with the final design. At these times, you may need to find a respectful and non-threatening way to help educate a customer on choices that are aesthetically more suitable or technically correct.

Custom picture framing is both a service and a profession. It’s important to invite dialog with your customer. So the final result is a piece you can both be proud of. It doesn’t always have to be your personal style, but you can rest assured that the piece is framed correctly and is aesthetically appealing. Remember, customers come to you as a professional who provides a service. So be confident in giving them your best advice. Here are a few tips:

**10 Steps to Lead Customers to Decisions They Feel Are Right**

1. Ask them to tell you why they want something to be framed. This question will usually reveal a lot more than you think.
2. Ask for their vision about the frame design. If they don’t know what they like, then ask them what they don’t like. This can help provide a general direction.
3. If you disagree with their design directions or choices, offer them alternatives. If they don’t like this, ask them to share with you what they like best about their first option.
4. Make sure customers always feel like they are being heard. When they are talking, listen to them. Never speak over a customer.
5. Reconfirm that the design direction is one the customer will be pleased with long term.
6. Refrain from telling customers that their design choices are wrong or saying, “No, you can’t do that.”
7. If required, politely explain why certain design options may not work or could be improved. Your motive is simply their long-term satisfaction. For example, “Now that I see your direction, here are a few other ideas and options for you to consider as well.”
8. Advise them of what the expected turnaround time for their job completion will be.
9. Always reconfirm with them how the final design satisfies their specific desires and requirements (which may have altered since the start of the consultation).
10. Compliment your customers on their choice of styles and taste.

**Resolving Disputes**

“I’m not very happy with this frame you made for me because there is a big scratch along the side of the frame, and I want you to fix it!”

You’ve heard this before, and it’s not always an easy situation to solve. So how do you work through this situation so you both feel good about the outcome?

When it comes to avoiding potential customer conflict, it is important that you do not focus on the causes of a particular situation. Instead, focus on the solution. Also try to keep a mindset of working with your customers, not against them. Avoid an “us vs. them” scenario.

If the solution is easy enough to fix, just do it. Research shows that 7 in 10 customers will do business with a company again if that business resolves a complaint in their favor. So make good on all your mistakes, and never make excuses. Always avoid arguments, and be humble enough to apologize. Proudly stand behind everything you do. Remember, winning an argument may not win a customer.

Disgruntled customers can sometimes be unreasonable, and you often need to quickly assess if a gesture of goodwill will retain their future potential. Some framing businesses have an extra financial allowance built into their overhead, considered a goodwill-marketing budget, to allow for dealing with dispute resolution. This allows them to say, “No problem; we’ll fix that for you” with a smile, knowing that their prices will cover such situations.

On the rare occasion when a
customer makes an unreasonable or outrageous demand, you need to be able to walk away calmly and politely, especially when you know you have tried your best.

10 Steps to Customer Satisfaction
When Conflict Arises
1. Calmly ask the customer to explain the issue to you. Make sure you get the whole story, and quickly research or verify facts if required.
2. Make sure customers feel like they are being heard. When they are talking, listen without interruption.
3. Remain professional at all times, and keep your emotions in check.
4. Refrain from telling customers they are wrong or suggest that they are being untruthful.
5. Demonstrate that you really want to help.
6. Politely reconfirm with customers what they are trying to tell you, so they know you understand their situations.
7. Ask them what their expected outcomes are. How would they like you to resolve a situation?
8. Ask yourself, is there a way I can convert this negative situation into a positive one?
9. Focus on the solution, not the problem.
10. Know when to walk away.

Conclusion
Success in business comes from learning to meet your customer’s needs before your own. Ultimately, you still need to meet your business needs as well, so finding solutions that align with your customer’s needs will lead to a long-term, beneficial relationship for you both. Make sure you find ways to do this in a subtle manner that aligns with your customer’s needs.

So, are customers always right? Regardless of whether they are right or wrong, taking this approach to business will never steer you wrong.

Jared Davis, MCPF, GCF, is an educator at industry tradeshows and conventions who specializes in sales and marketing. Based in Brisbane, Australia, Jared has had 20 years experience in the framing industry, and has authored numerous articles for major industry publications. He now works full-time as a product manager for Megawood Larson-Juhl in Australia and as an international educator and consultant for Gunnar International. He is also the author of Getting the Most Value from Your CMC. He can be reached at jared@jared-davis.com.