

Thank-You Notes |

BY SANDRA FORD WALSTON

Most of you probably groaned when you saw the topic of this column, but think about the implications and the possibilities. No one is ever too important or too busy to say “thank you!” Yet I’m continually surprised at how few thank-you notes are sent these days. Hallmark officials recently told

The Denver Post that Americans give about seven million greeting cards a year, but only 3% of those are thank-you cards.

In this day of “high tech,” the writing of thank-you notes seems the most nearly effortless means to attain the “high touch” everyone is asking for. The unique handwritten thank-you note is a modest action taken to make someone else feel good, and it engages its sender as it reinforces kind or helpful actions. Handwritten thank-you notes are different from today’s standard e-mail or typed notes. If you choose to send an e-mail note, write “thank you” in the subject line, and consider ending it “In gratitude.” All three choices can start the first sentence with highlighting the specific action that reflects your appreciation. It doesn’t matter who we are or how

small the action or services, we all appreciate being recognized for our efforts.

A while back I returned from a business trip to Kansas where I had delivered a customized training program to a large, multilocation accounting firm. The topic I had addressed was client service—developing the “personal touch.”

During the sessions, I introduced what I believed to be a rather obvious possibility, using the firm’s own attractive, personalized note cards to acknowledge clients and others. But more than 50% of this large staff wasn’t aware that the cards were available! Now that they knew, I suggested that at the end of each day employees review their conversations with clients and write thank-you notes where indicated.

Starting with a comment that



shows your gratitude and enthusiasm would demonstrate that the needs and concerns of the client had been duly noted, understood, and appreciated. Isn’t this what active listening means—truly *hearing* what a person is saying? You can start with a thank-you template but personalize the first sentence each time so it reflects the situation you’re writing about. That way you’ll feel like you’re being unique every time.

If you really want to impress a client, prospective client, or friend,

attach an article you've read that targets an interest of theirs. Also, keeping scissors handy as you read the morning paper will remind you to clip articles or photos of clients or prospects. Attaching these items to your personal letterhead or your company's letterhead or sending a fax with a brief congratulation from you will speak volumes. If you do your reading via computer, many websites let you e-mail the article to a friend, or you can send them the link to the article. I practiced this as part of my regular routine when I was in commercial private banking. Today it's habit.

I also ask friends and colleagues to mail me articles they know I would find interesting. One of my friends once sent an article she saw in *Fortune* magazine on customer service. After sending off a delighted thank-you, I mailed the article to a prospective client, just to touch base about a conversation we had about sales and marketing training. I got business from them *and* a thank-you!

One more item: If you go for a job interview, be sure to write a follow-up thank-you note. Many people say they got their job because of that extra effort.

The Power of Personal Touch

I believe there's a distinct correlation between the time we give the thank-you and the amount of business we receive. When we offer this courtesy, the returns continue to manifest. But what keeps this simple gesture from happening? When things go right, we believe it's "normal," so we don't think we need to do anything. What's the point? Yet all of us want to be valued for our efforts, even for such things as who takes initiative or who rarely uses a sick day.

This marketing idea is critical in any industry. I started selling real estate in a large metropolitan area where I had only one friend. I not only worked hard seven days a week to build my business, but I used the company-provided note cards and stamps to connect with local homeowners. I wrote short two- to three-word sentences like "The new brick trim on the front of your house looks great and adds drive-by presence and value. Call me for a free

Quick Tips

- * It doesn't matter who we are or how small the action or services, we all appreciate being acknowledged for our efforts.
- * At the end of each day, review your conversations with your clients/customers and write a thank-you note or express a personal sentiment that reveals you listen.
- * Keep your eyes and scissors focused on articles your clients/customers or prospects might be interested in, and send the link with a "thinking about you" in the subject line, snail mail the piece with an attached personal note, or send a fax to touch base.
- * Practice simple courtesies. No one is ever too important or too busy (unless they harbor a false sense of importance) to send a note to say "thank you!"

appraisal! Thank you." And I always responded to Sunday open house "walk-ins" by sending a follow-up thank-you. My business grew quickly and dramatically, part of which I attribute to simple courtesies.

Let me end by thanking my mother, who worked hard to instill in me the values by which I live. Among her teachings I particularly remember is her dictum, "Never take gifts or thoughtful actions by others for granted." This is an important lesson for parents to incorporate—it goes with teaching manners. I think back to the time I sat at the small family desk as I was trying to write unique and personal thank-you notes for my eighth grade graduation gifts. As a youngster, it was difficult to individualize each note, but the effect of both the writing and the actual mailing of those cards gave me a lift, a sense of accomplishment, and satisfaction. Have you ever noticed how good it feels when *you* receive one of these personalized notes? Sending them can feel just as good.

Why not make a promise to yourself: Try my end-of-the-day ritual for one month to determine the impact of a short (and preferred), handwritten thank-you (or e-mail)—and thank you for taking time to read this article. ■

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