

# Customers in Crisis

Helping customers deal with fear, uncertainty and doubt.

By Jim Cecil

What do you do when you are at a loss for words? That's the way a caller opened our conversation last week. He said, "expressing my feelings has never been easy for me and the experiences of the past few weeks reminded me of how important communicating with my people and my customers is. It also highlighted how seldom I actually do anything about it. Here's the question, Jim. How do you know what to say? How do you come up with the reasons to stay in touch?"

That's a great question. And just staying in touch can be risky if you don't pay close attention. The easiest way to decide when and how to touch customers is to think with a farming metaphor. Whether cultivating friends, family, employees, customers or partners, there are certain laws, immutable since time began, that rules life and all living things. These simple, ancient laws of nature provide clear guides to appropriate behavior toward our customers especially in turbulent times.

It's a fact. Like plants, like children, like pets, like friend and lovers....all living things, including customers, respond to pampering. And predictably enough, those deprived, wither.

*"Unto all things, there is a season."*

Any general business downturn chills like winter. As we enter the winter season, there is much work yet to be done. It's time to clean, cultivate, protect, repair, rest. It is also the season we say thanks and give thanks. The holiday of Thanksgiving affords a wonderful time and purpose to touch customers. Whether a brief, hand-written, heartfelt thank you note in a beautiful, expensive thanksgiving card or just an email acknowledging the feeling of the season, it's a perfect time to nurture. Here are 7 simple ways partners can 'hug' a customer, express appropriate feelings and make a personal contact that counts. Start small. Begin with your 20 best customers.

## 1. Say thank you.

Just sit down and write someone a personal note this morning. Say how much you appreciate the business. Express how important their loyalty and support has been to your success. Outline ways your certified status makes you of even greater, tangible value to them. Let them know you are there for them. One of our clients gave permission to share their own "reassurance letter."

*Dear George:*

*Nearly everyone has suffered from the events of the past year and the past weeks. Your country and mine — your business and mine — your family and employees and mine.*

*Some of our customers are suffering far more than others from the current economic condition of fear, uncertainty and doubt and that is why I wanted to write you personally this morning.*

*Your loyalty and business support over the years have meant a lot to all of us here at \_\_\_\_\_. During times of crisis, friends help friends and I want you to know that every employee of this company including me has committed to do everything in our power to assist you should you need our help in any way.*



## 2. Send a nice gift - talk is cheap.

It doesn't take 5 minutes on line to order an orchid. Send some great Belgian Chocolate. If you really want to "knock their socks off", send a perfectly appropriate, perfectly healthy and absolutely delicious fresh fruit way to say thank you month after month. For some tasty ideas, visit [www.FreshSuccess.com](http://www.FreshSuccess.com).

## 3. Invite them to something

Hire a good speaker, plan an event that provides value and says thanks as well. Call it "Turnaround Tactics" - Conduct an executive briefing, a breakfast meeting, a webinar.

## 4. Intentionally inspire them

Send them a hot book or an inexpensive book summary ([www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com)). Choose a bestseller on their issues and write a personal inscription on the inside cover.

## 5. Make a phone call

Write a script to use as a guide. Determine your purpose, questions and outcomes.

## 6. Do them a favor

- **Find a pain - study it - do some research** - provide your findings as an offer or an outright gift.
- **Lend a hand** - put a member of your staff on site to help out in tough times.
- **Give them a referral** - Offer to host a 'rolodex party'. Find a good lead for them among your contacts.

## 7. Ask them for their opinion

- Short Surveys
- Product Presentations
- Focus group dinner
- Demo/trial
- Beta site

## Summary

A philosopher once said, "It often takes a crisis to find out who your real friends are." Take this opportunity to truly nurture your critical relationships and demonstrate your deeply held values. Get proactive. Reach out and touch some of your critical constituencies. Consider customers in crisis as the springtime. Time to sow new seeds, nurture new life and cultivate old friends.

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