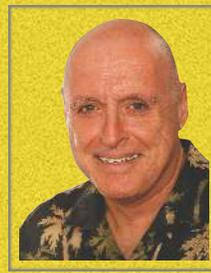


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



680 Simple Questions Can Mean Business

Could a simple question transform a business? I'm Jerry Roberts and today, a story on how a very basic question did exactly that. It's coming next, on The Extra Point.

The power of a simple question. I knew a kid in college named Dave. He was a likeable guy, good at fixing cars, and worked for a couple of small mechanic shops after high school. It was then he learned that the small shops had trouble getting good service from parts suppliers. Dave saw opportunity.

He got distributorship deals with a couple of regional suppliers, and mechanics ordered from him over the phone. He got payment terms from the suppliers, and the mechanics paid him cash on delivery.

He expanded to service more shops and when he no longer could handle all deliveries, he hired fellow students who were looking for work.

Dave also sold parts to students on two campuses. He once told me his profit was \$100,000 for the year. In today's money, that's nearly \$700,000 profit, for a 20-year-old.

Okay, to the simple question. Dave got to know his customers well. He said he never got off the phone without asking, "So, George, how else can I help your business today?" Because he had been a mechanic, he spoke their language and they would open up and tell him their problems.

Asking the question didn't always lead to new business, but one day a customer told him he was having trouble sourcing reasonably priced equipment. After he got a similar answer from a couple more, what do you think Dave did? He went into the equipment business. He said that question made him a lot of money.

In fact, he'd been asking questions like that since junior high school. He had a good push

mower — those are the ones with no motor — and cut a lawn or two every day after school and more on weekends, from the time he was 13. One day, he innocently asked a lady customer if there was anything else she needed, and she asked if he could do some trimming in her garden the next time. "Sure I can," he said, having never trimmed anything before.

He went to the neighborhood gardening store and asked how to trim. They told him and he went back that week. The woman paid him more for the trimming than she did for her lawn. Young Dave was in the trimming business.

Another woman responded to the question by asking him to edge her sidewalks, making them neat and uniform. He'd never edged a lawn before. What did he do? He went to the garden store and learned how. He was now an edger and added it on as a service.

One customer said he needed help to make some sense of a back yard. He wanted trees planted, some rocks put in, and a birdbath. Eighth-grader Dave went where? To the garden store. They gave him ideas, and he was then a junior landscaper, and got paid handsomely. All because he asked how he could help.

Now, Dave was entrepreneurial. He sought opportunity. What does this mean for us? Whether we work in a large business, small business, or we're self-employed, we can always ask our customers how else we can help. How else can I add value to you?

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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