



EXPERTS TONY GATTARI

# HOW TO CLIMB THE LADDER OF LOYALTY

“How do you take a suspect through the levels of the loyalty ladder to be an evangelist for your business?”

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Every business owner dreams of maximising the number of evangelists for their business. Evangelists are the people who will shout your praises from the rooftop and help you in building an ever-expanding loyal customer base — and all for free.

What more can you ask for? But how do you go about turning your prospects into evangelists? I say this is not an automatic thing; you need to have systems and processes in place to make the customer experience as close to heaven as possible.

This is where the ‘ladder of loyalty’ comes in. It is a customer categorisation tool with seven levels. You start with people who might be potential customers of your business.

While keeping them engaged with your great product line and amazing customer service, you keep increasing their level of loyalty and eventually, you will have yourself an evangelist for your business.

First, let’s take a look at these different levels of the ladder of loyalty.

1. **Suspect** — The first level comprises people who might be potential buyers. This is essentially anybody who could buy from your business. For example, your product is available in Melbourne only, then the whole of Melbourne (regardless of demographics, target market etc.) would be your suspect.
2. **Prospects** — The second level consists of people who are the potential buyers of your product or service. They haven’t bought from you yet, but they have expressed some form of interest. This interest could be in the form of a phone inquiry or a request for a quote. The greatest cost in running a business is that of getting a prospect. Advertising budgets speak for themselves.
3. **Customers** — The third level is reserved for people who buy from you. The critical factor here is the fact that most people are just one-time buyers. So, the company has to go out there and find new prospects. Some businesses spend millions of dollars on prospecting strategies, which results in lead generation. Out of these leads some buy from you and some don’t. If the buyers are just one-time customers, then you have to repeat the whole process again and again. This is a very costly proposition and the main reason why you must focus on taking customers to next level.
4. **Clients** — The clients are basically repeat customers. They buy from you more than once. This is important, because it shows they have found your product/service good enough to use again.

5. **Members** — Members are the people who feel part of your tribe. They have a sense of ownership with your offerings. Loyalty cards and memberships are examples of techniques that can help get customers to this level. Achieving this level helps you in communicating with your market.

6. **Advocate** — Advocates are people who, when asked, will recommend your company to others. Many people take recommendations and a second opinion into consideration before they buy a new product. So, the next time someone asks for the best restaurant in town, if you are a restaurant owner and have advocate-level clientele, then you can expect some new guests around.

7. **Evangelists** — Evangelists are the people who don’t need to be asked. They are walking, talking testimonials for your product/service. They can’t stop talking about you. Nowadays, people hardly believe what you have to say about yourself. They are more interested in and trusting of what others have to say about you. So, making evangelists for your business is even more important today. With the boom of social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.), your customers can communicate better among themselves. A good or bad review tweet can make or break your business in today’s tech-savvy world.

Secondly, and more importantly, how do you take a suspect through the levels of the loyalty ladder to become an evangelist for your business?

I believe that the most important factor here is the culture of your business. Your sales team must not think of closing a sale as the end of customer engagement but rather as opening an opportunity. You must have great people who live by this culture.

It is a great idea to have a rewards program in your business that sales team members can use to help move customers up the loyalty ladder. Having different levels of service for different customers is another helpful factor.

In short, it is the systems, technology and right attitude that, when in place, will take your company to new levels of customer relationship. Get this right and you will see your evangelists list expanding all the time. ■■