

Wildfire Service Excellence

Six Imperatives For Creating Advocates

From Your Clients

Steven Johnstone



stevenjohnstone.com

INTRODUCTION

Dear Real Estate Professional

ABOUT STEVE JOHNSTONE

Before we can talk about the ***Six Service Excellence Imperatives*** for creating endless referrals, I want to take a moment to introduce myself. I need to tell you at least a little about my background so that you will read what follows with the kind of confidence required to make it at all helpful!



Yes, that's me in the photo (and yes, I like books!). Married. Three kids. Happy.

From 2003 - 2009 I ran South Africa's premier real estate training and one-on-one coaching business, Providence Coaching Systems, with licensed operations in the US and Australia. We trained thousands upon thousands of agents, and we coached hundreds one-on-one. You can read some of our clients' testimonials here: <http://stevenjohnstone.com>

We trained and coached many of the top agents in the country, especially in the skills of *lead generation*. Our proven system allows agents to virtually eliminate cold-calling, direct mail, etc and instead work exclusively by referral. If you're a real estate agent (an 'estate agent' in South African lingo) I'm sure that sounds good! Who doesn't want to develop a steady stream of warm, pre-qualified referred leads! Well, as much as it may sound too good to be true, that is exactly what our system does — predictably. If, of course, you work the system.

In 2009 I left the world of business and spent a remarkable season in the non-profit and ministry space (something which I had always longed for and was grateful for the opportunity to do). For three years I ran an international campaign against corruption called Unashamedly Ethical, building that to the point where we had a footprint in over 80 nations. Then from 2012 to 2016 I completed a Masters degree through RTS in Charlotte, NC and I ran a Bible College in Cape Town - another amazingly rewarding season.

All this time, however, I have been aware that my referral system still has huge potential and could help many Realtors®/real estate agents like yourself to make more money in fewer hours while at the same time building better relationships.

And so what I have decided to do is to make my referral system available online. In 2017 I have done a major online launch to a limited global audience, of which you are a part. I trust that the rest of this course will be a great blessing to you!

Generating a steady stream of referrals is one thing (which is what my online course will teach you exactly how to do) but knowing how to sell to and service those clients once you've been introduced to them is equally as important. I believe there are six major strategies, six simple "Keys" you might say, to providing the kind of service to your clients that will see them become long-term supporters of your business.

ESSENTIALS FOR WORKING BY REFERRAL

There is a huge difference between making a sale and creating an Advocate. If you want to work exclusively by referral you have to do more than successfully help someone buy or sell their home. You have to transition them at the same time from ***knowing you, to liking you, to trusting you***. There is a relational job to do. If you do this relational job right, you will not only make a sale but you will also create an Advocate who potentially refers you to many more new clients. This is just one more good reason to offer exceptional customer service.

I specialise in teaching real estate professionals how to work exclusively by referral. In a nutshell, our system stands upon two legs:

You have to:

1. Give people a reason to talk about you.
2. Build long-term relationships with them while knowing how to get referrals from them.

The second part of that equation (building relationships while getting referrals systematically) I will teach you in **the Successful Real Estate Agent e-Seminar**.

And so, without further adieu, here we go...

There are six imperatives:

1. Communicate understanding of your client's emotions.
2. Be flexible! Show your client you're willing to try.
3. **WOW!** your clients with little touches of service throughout the transaction.
4. Give your client your undivided attention.
5. Keep the experience pleasant at all times.
6. Maintain constant communication throughout the transaction.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE #1

COMMUNICATE UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR CLIENT'S EMOTIONS

Do you know what the fundamental difference between a good and a bad salesperson is?

Here's the fact:

Bad salespeople try to **coerce** others to make decisions they do not want to make, while good salespeople **help** people make decisions they do want or need to make.

Bad salespeople simply never listen. Are you hearing me? I hope so, because bad salespeople never listen! They think that the more information they can give, the more likely they are to make a sale.

I remember when my wife (Danielle) and I had small kids. We had three kids in three-and-a-half years, so things were obviously busy in my house (before and after the kids arrived!). Things changed pretty fast, including what car we needed. The little Toyota Conquest just wasn't going to cut it anymore. So we headed on down to a local dealership where Danielle had organised a test-drive, and that's where we first met Bernie the Renault salesman. As we stepped onto the showroom floor we were met enthusiastically by Bernie who gave me a firm handshake. Bernie was obviously anxious to avoid any small talk and believed that the vehicle would do the talking for itself (aided by his commentary of course) because we were ushered to the car in no time at all. From the time I met Bernie on the floor, through our time on the test drive, through our time back at the showroom (where we listened to Bernie some **more**) I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that I didn't speak one word. Bernie just talked and talked and talked and talked, and when he was finished talking, just to be sure, he talked some more. Bless Bernie's heart, he had obviously recently completed the Renault Scenic info-course and was keen to deliver via regurgitation every possible fact he could remember. And boy, he really did give it everything he had.

Now, if you have ever done any kind of sales training you will have heard this advice: **Don't sell features, sell benefits**. I.e. don't say to a buyer: "This house has high ceilings." Rather, say, "This house has high ceilings, **which means** it will stay cool in

summer.” (The way you get from features to benefits is by using the words “which means”.) The only problem with this advice is that it doesn’t work! Why do I say that? Because that is not the best way to make a sale, and it is certainly not the best way to create an Advocate. The only features or benefits which a salesperson should be telling the client about are those which the client is **interested in**! And how are you supposed to find out what your clients want? Obviously you have to **ask questions** and **listen to them**! This was Bernie’s great error.

Memory is a funny thing. When I cast my mind back to that memorable day those many years ago, I can still see Bernie’s mouth moving but all I hear is, “Bla, bla-bla-bla-bla, bla-bla-bla-bla, bla, bla, BLA!” But then there is a sudden break in the clouds of memory and I hear Bernie saying this: “And Mr Johnstone, something else about this car is that it has titanium in the windscreen (windshield) which means you won’t get sunburnt while you’re driving the car.” Then my memory goes straight back to, “bla-bla-bla-bla, bla-bla-bla-bla...” For some reason my brain retained that one sentence, but not for the reason Bernie would have liked. I think I recall that because at the time I remember sitting there thinking to myself, “Bernie, that is the most unbelievably arbitrary piece of information any human being has ever given me!” I remember thinking, “Bernie, I have absolutely no interest whatsoever in not having my arms burnt through the window. In fact, Bernie, most of the time I drive with the window open with my arm hanging out. Bernie, why on earth are you telling me that?” But you see, in Bernie’s defence, he was only doing what the sales training manual told him to do: he wasn’t selling features, he was selling benefits. He even used the magic words, “which means”! He had been listing features followed by benefits for 20 minutes by the time he came to: **Feature**: there’s titanium in the windscreen, **benefit**: “which means” you won’t get sunburnt. Well done, Bernie! Only problem, of course, was that Bernie was trying to get me to buy something I did not want. It smacked of insincerity. He didn’t care what **we** wanted, what was important to us. He was only interested in selling us what he had so that he could make buck.

Good salespeople, on the other hand, listen. The first thing they do is ask questions. And they listen actively. That means they are listening for certain cues, and I’d like to suggest to you that the most important thing for you to be listening for is **emotional** wants or needs. That’s what top salespeople do. They listen carefully enough to know what is truly important to the prospect, what touches their emotions, and then they meet those desires with logical solutions. If Bernie had taken the trouble to just ask one simple question of me: “Mr Johnstone, what is important to you about purchasing a new car?” he would have found out pretty quickly that the reason I was at Renault was that their cars had a great reputation for safety, and that this particular vehicle had the right amount of space for my growing family. Safety and space. And what Bernie should have then done was tell me predominantly about the

features and benefits that related to these two topics. That creates the impression in a client's mind that you care enough to listen to them and help them get what **they** want.

Once in one of my seminars an agent was getting really excited as I was speaking through these issues. He interrupted me and said, "I'm busy trying to find a house for a Scottish couple and she wants a big kitchen. So what I'm going to do this Saturday is, instead of marching them through the whole house I'll be showing them, I'm just going to take them straight into the kitchen, hop up onto the counter, and make small-talk while she enjoys the sea view." I said, "That's good thinking Paul, but can I ask you a question? **Why** does she want a big kitchen?" And there was silence. Paul scratched his head and hopefully the penny dropped. He didn't know, you see. At that moment one of the ladies in the audience shouted out, "I know why she wants a big kitchen!..." As she said that, however, I interrupted her, "Ma'am, I'm very sorry to interrupt you but do you realise you are about to make the mistake that I am talking about." She said, rather confused, "No I'm not. Listen, every woman wants a big..." I interrupted her again and said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry to interrupt you twice in a row, but you **are** making the very mistake I am trying to teach you about." What was her mistake? Yes, she was **assuming** to know why Paul's client wanted a big kitchen.

There are two big problems with assuming to know why people want what they want. First, you might assume incorrectly. So I said to this lady, "Ma'am, the truth be told, you have no idea why this couple wants a big kitchen. They might really love tango dancing and when they got married 40 years ago they could not afford a home of their own, and in their little one-bedroom rented apartment in Glasgow, which is freezing in winter, the only warm room in the house is the kitchen, and they might have had an absolutely minute kitchen, and one day as they huddled together in front of the stove the husband might have made a promise to his bride (in a broad Scots accent): **"One day when we can afford it we won't live in a wee hoos! I'm going to buy you a hoos with an absolutely enormous kitchen, me bonnie las, and we're gonna to do the tango in it!"**

Most purchasing decisions are made on emotion. As a real estate professional I'm sure you know that this is especially true of people buying or selling a home. It's all about emotion, the logic and the facts must come second.

I'm not saying people don't care about the numbers. What I am telling you is that if you never seek to understand the emotion behind your clients' transaction you will never be a top performing agent. You'll get clients and you'll do transactions but you'll never win people's hearts. You'll never build long-term relationships. And what this means is that **you'll never work by referral**. And that is the second reason why

you should never assume to know people's emotions and motives. They have to feel as if they have had the chance to express these to you in such a way that you understand them. Here is the absolutely key principle at the end of a transaction:

NOW READ CAREFULLY...

It is not enough for you to know **WHAT** your clients want.

It is not even enough for you to know **WHY** your clients want what they want.

Your **CLIENTS** must know that you knew what they wanted and why.

Now that's a mouthful, and I'm going to ask you to read it again slowly.

Everybody wants to feel understood. And the only way to find out what a client wants, and why they want it, is to **ask** and **listen**. Ask questions like:

"Mrs Edwards, what is most important to you about buying a home?"

Then ask **why** those things are important. And then for goodness sake, close your mouth and listen! Then when she's done, mirror back to her her emotions:

"So Mrs Edwards, if I am understanding you correctly, you are wanting a home with a garden where there is a lot of sunlight because your 6-year-old daughter loves playing outside, and you want her to be able to have a warm, beautiful, peaceful space where she can do just that. Am I right?"

Most bad salespeople wouldn't have even heard Mrs Edwards speak about her daughter. They'd be too busy telling her about the carport, the brass taps in the bathrooms and the extra large sink in the scullery!

Then, here's an absolutely golden tip for you that will create a raving fan out of every client you ever represent:

When concluding the transaction, use a **hand-written, personal note** (I speak lots more on these in the Successful Real Estate Agent e-seminar) together with a **relevant gift** as a way to demonstrate to the client that you understood her emotions.

For Mrs Edwards, that may simply be two floral hats, one for her and one for her daughter, together with a note saying:

“Congrats on your new home, Mrs Edwards. You and Annie are going to spend so much quality time together in the beautiful garden that I thought these (hats) would come in handy!”

Now she knows that you knew! She knows you understood. And she’ll refer you till the cows come home! (...**if** you have a referral system, of course, which is what I’d love the opportunity to teach you at my [Successful Real Estate Agent e-Seminar](#) seminar).

For Paul and his Scottish clients it might have meant leaving a CD player in the kitchen with a tango music CD in it gently playing, with a little note next to it saying:

“Congrats on the new home, Mr and Mrs McDermot! May this kitchen be filled with music & dancing, and with many fond memories of those days in Glasgow.”

Paul didn’t just sell a home, did he? He fulfilled a life-long dream. And what is more, he created an Advocate.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE #2

BE FLEXIBLE! SHOW YOUR CLIENT YOU'RE WILLING TO TRY

Bad salespeople are inflexible to their client's needs. Good salespeople, on the other hand, are willing to listen and will try to meet the client's needs (within certain uncontrollable boundaries). If you want to create Advocates you have to give your clients the genuine impression that you are willing to try to give them what they want, even if it is a little unreasonable.

If you've seen the movie "Falling Down" with Michael Douglas who plays a 'Joe Public' kind of average working class guy who has just lost his job and is getting sick of the impersonal, loveless nature of the world. There's a great scene in the beginning when he goes into a fast food restaurant and asks the girl behind the counter, "Can I have some breakfast please." "I'm sorry, sir," she replies, with a tremendously well-rehearsed smile on her face, "We stop serving breakfast at 11. You'll have to order something off the lunch menu." So he says, "But I don't want lunch. I want breakfast." With the same Colgate smile she says, "Yeah, well that's too bad because we're not serving breakfast anymore." So he says, "Is that the manager?" She gives him this sassy look and says, "Yeah." He leans over the counter and says, "Could you please call him." So she turns to the manager and calls in her most cheerful tone, "Rick, there's a customer who'd like to speak with you." Rick comes over. He is the most nerdy looking guy, and under his arm is "the system" (some kind of file). He is the epitome of everything Douglas's character is sick of: the inflexible, unloving, impersonal system. "Yes, sir," says Rick in a firm but not unfriendly manner. "Well, er, Rick (is that your name), Rick I'd like to order some breakfast please." This does not fit with Rick's system unfortunately and so he repeats the words the girl has already said: "I'm sorry sir, we stop serving breakfast at 11. You'll have to order something off the lunch menu." Douglas looks at his watch. It says 11.02. He looks back at Rick and says, Rick, have you ever heard the phrase 'The customer is always right'?" Rick says, "Yeah." "Well," says Douglas, "Here I am: the customer." But Rick, undaunted, replies, "Well, that's not our policy. I'm really sorry." So Michael Douglas says, "Yeah, I'm really sorry too," pulls out a machine gun and starts blowing the place to kingdom come.

It's a classic scene, and one which all salespeople should think about, because we can all make people feel that way. How many times have you been asked by a client to do something that was completely unreasonable, and in response you heard the words coming out of your mouth, "No, unfortunately that won't be possible, I'm

sorry.”? (As if the word “unfortunately” somehow makes up for our unwillingness to try!) If you want to destroy an Advocate, just say “No” to them immediately.

Let me teach you some absolutely magic words which every salesperson would do well to memorise:

“Let me see what I can do.”

The next time someone asks you something completely ridiculous like, “We only have so much cash available, so would you mind halving your commission to make this deal work?” instead of breaking out into uncontrollable laughter followed by reaching for your machine gun, just say, “Hmmm, that’s a creative solution. I’ll need to crunch some numbers. Give me a day or two and let me see what I can do.” The next day you come back to them and say, “I’ve been thinking about this transaction and how we can make it work. You asked me to look at reducing my commission. I did crunch some numbers but it turns out that that’s not a possibility here. But here’s what I would like to suggest...”

What would have happened if, when Michael Douglas made his first request for breakfast, the checkout girl in the movie had just said, “Sir, we normally stop serving breakfast at 11, but if you don’t mind waiting a minute, let me go back into the kitchen and see what I can do.” Even if she hadn’t spoken to anyone in the kitchen, returned to him and said, “Sir, I’m so sorry about this. I spoke with the head of the kitchen and unfortunately they’ve packed all the breakfast stuff away. If you’re happy to wait 15-20 minutes they will try to find a gap somewhere to unpack what’s needed make you a breakfast. Otherwise, are you sure there’s nothing on the lunch menu that we could perhaps tempt you with?” He wouldn’t have pulled out the machine gun, that’s for sure. The issue wasn’t that he couldn’t have breakfast. It was that no one cares enough to try. In fact, as the hilarious scene unfolds in the movie, Michael Douglas ends up saying to the terrified Rick, “Rick, I’ve changed my mind. I think I will have some lunch!” Clients don’t expect you to give them everything they want, but they do expect you to care enough to try. And if you don’t, you can forget about ever getting any referrals from them!

SERVICE EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE #3

WOW! YOUR CLIENTS WITH LITTLE TOUCHES OF SERVICE THROUGHOUT THE TRANSACTION

Understand that the biggest reason that your clients will refer you is that you provided them with exceptional service. Now, as I'll show you in the **Successful Real Estate Agent e-Seminar**, service excellence on its own is not enough — you have to have a referral generating system as well. But without the service excellence “it ain't gonna work!”

Understand this principle:

Making an impression that will last 5+ years is not difficult, nor is it expensive.

I'd like you to think about a home that you bought or sold personally more than five years ago. Got it? Who was the agent who sold you that home? Do you remember him/her? Now, do you remember anything outstanding about him/her which he/she did by way of customer service? (I commonly ask my audiences that questions and predictably it's only about 10% of people who can remember something about their Realtor®/real estate agent. It turns out that 90% of Realtors®/real estate agents are not memorable!)

Well, if you can remember something I'd be willing to bet that it was something small, something inexpensive. I know that because here is what makes things memorable:

**People remember anything that is
unexpected and unnecessary.**

I'm going to suggest an exercise to you. Make a long list of the normal stages and tasks of a transaction, a “transaction timeline,” from the initial listing presentation all the way through to the new buyer moving in. Don't miss out any significant moment,

paperwork, approval, meeting, conversation, decision, process conclusion, etc. Now, next to each point, brainstorm (do it with your team if you have one) three clever customer service ideas which the client will experience as being both unexpected and unnecessary. Don't worry, you won't do them all. Here's what I suggest: When you have found **three** service ideas that work for you, create a **system** that ensures you do them on **every** transaction. For example:

1. At the first "show house"/"open house" give the family free movie tickets so that they don't have to find somewhere to mill around.
2. When the mortgage/bond is approved drop a note with a bag of chocolate gold coins with it, saying "So pleased at today's news! We're in the money and one big step closer to...(their emotional want/need)."
3. On the day the new buyer moves in, fill the house with flowers and leave a pot of hot tea on the kitchen counter with a note.

Then do that on **every** transaction. Your greatest asset in real estate is that most of the competition don't do these sorts of things. You're giving people a reason to talk about you. Don't worry about the extra bit of expense this represents to you. It will pay huge dividends down the track in referrals if you have a system to keep in touch with them in the months and years following the transaction.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE #4

GIVE YOUR CLIENT YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION

A huge poll done by the National Association of Realtors® (NAR) throughout the United States revealed what our customers want:

What Clients Want

1. Their agent's undivided attention.
2. Someone who understands their needs.
3. A salesperson they feel they can trust.

Point 3 (about **trust**) is the main benefit to working by referral. If you have been referred to Mrs Edwards she already feels like she can trust you because her friend Mr Jones used you and he raved about you! It is this part of the process of building a real estate business — knowing how to generate a steady stream of warm referrals — that I teach in our **Successful Real Estate Agent e-Seminar**.

Point 2 above is what we spoke about earlier in **Service Excellence Imperative #1**.

But let me remark briefly on point 1 (clients' wanting you undivided attention). There are two categories in which you should be thinking about this: 1) When you are not with your clients, and 2) When you are with your clients.

When you are not with your clients, you must maintain contact with them, and if they try to get hold of you, leave a message or send an e-mail, you must get back to them sharply. More on this under Imperative #6 below.

But the one we probably speak to little about is giving your clients your attention when you **are** (physically) with them. The biggest enemy of giving your clients your undivided attention is your.....

...can you guess?...

Yes! Your **cell phone**! Switch it off or onto silent when you are with a client. As a Realtor®/real estate agent you make a lot of money in a single transaction. You're not just making a few bucks selling plastic widgets! Given how much you make on a transaction, how much your clients are paying you, and given how important this transaction is for most people, don't you agree that you have no right to ask them to wait while you take a call from someone else, or check a WhatsApp, e-mail or text message?

Then another major issue in this regard is eye-contact. Don't overdo it though - it can get very weird if it turns into the death-stare! But don't be looking all around the place, over your shoulder, over their shoulder, when they're talking to you. I've seen people so bad at this that you think they're running from the FBI. When you are with your clients, be **with** your clients. Give them your attention, and look them in the eye.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE #5








KEEP THE EXPERIENCE PLEASANT AT ALL TIMES

Always remember this:

No matter how good you are at your work the process must be pleasant for the client.

It seems that only doctors and school teachers can get away with being rude to their clients! Anyway, the point is not so much that you won't list and sell a few people's homes. The problem is that when the transaction has finished they won't refer you to anyone. Referral depend on our transitioning people from know, to **like**, to trust. People have to like you. Now let me ask you a pointed question. Do people like you? Do your clients like you? Are you a fun and enjoyable person to be around. Or are you a bit haughty, a little passive-aggressive with your clients? Because Real Estate Agents can be! We can also be tremendously supercilious. That's a good word, go look it up if need to. The temptation is always to have our eyes on the money and not on the relationship. And of course the irony is that if you look after your relationships in real estate for 10, 15, 20 years you'll make more money than most, and you'll enjoy yourself too.

I challenge you to rate yourself out of 10 on the following:

-  I never lose my temper in front of a client: _____
-  I smile a lot (without being weird): _____
-  On the whole I am patient with all: _____
-  I am always polite: _____
-  I allays treat my clients with respect: _____
-  I never interrupt my clients when they're talking: _____
-  There is always humour in our relationships: _____

SERVICE EXCELLENCE IMPERATIVE #6 **MAINTAIN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION** **THROUGHOUT THE TRANSACTION**

This one is pretty simple:

There is only one way to make sure your client feels at ease throughout your transaction together:
CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

We have to remember that these people don't buy and sell homes for a living. A lot of the time they're clueless about mortgage stipulations and escrows and legal documents and deeds of sale and all the wonderful things you seem to spend your life sorting out. For them this is a scary process filled with unanswered questions and they need you to constantly be reassuring them, updating them on the process and encouraging them that all is well. In South Africa estate agents are infamous for dropping off the face of the earth after the signed Offer to Purchase gets sent off to the conveyancing attorney. But this is a crucial time to stay in touch, keep your client informed and at ease, and thereby keep yourself moving down the "know, like, trust" continuum with them.

My recommendation is that you ***diarise*** a weekly phone call to all current clients. If there's no news, then an e-mail or a text saying simply that still goes a long way to building their trust, which in turn will lead to more referrals in time to come.

CONCLUSION

I hope that the techniques I've discussed in this little e-book have made sense to you, and that you can see how ***you*** can use them in your own business to become more successful.

See you inside the course!

Steven