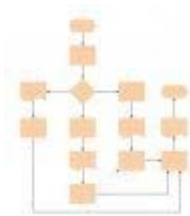


"Sometimes we're responsible for something not because we are to blame, but because we're the only ones who can change it."

»Lisa Feldman Barrett

Go With the Flowchart



One of my favorite subjects to bounce around with groups is the importance of having plans, but also understanding that the cosmos is not always on board with them.

For instance, when standing in front of a room of bankers, I know that most of them are in an accidental career.

Few of even the highly successful grew up planning to become a banker.

I ask folks to reflect upon their professional and personal lives... as far back as they can remember.

I then ask them to picture the flowchart of how they got from point A to B to C... and on. How many of the important inflection points that arose on their charts were clearly unpredicted?

Any Smiles on the Menu?



There is a comment I have made through the years that gets quizzical looks and open chuckles.

I tell groups that I absolutely appreciate any service provider who displays a sincere smile.

However, while I appreciate a sincere smile, I truly respect a fake one. I explain that anyone can smile when he or she is having a good day.

It takes someone with a true work ethic and respect for customers to force a smile onto his face when he really isn't feeling it at the moment.

I don't much care if that smile or pleasantry seems a little forced.

I'm impressed by the effort and showing of respect, even if not by their thespian skills.

Looking back now, our flowcharts make sense. We now know what happened.

We know how an unforeseen opportunity (or setback) fit into what came next. You can now see how it fits.

We also know that many of the unpleasant or stressful events or challenges at the time turned out to be instrumental in later making some of our more positive accomplishments possible.

Some setbacks serve the purpose of showing how committed we are (or not) to the goals we have at the time.

We can now see that some things we chased wholeheartedly because we just knew they were the key to happiness turned out to be...uh, not so much.

Conversely, some situations you may have felt forced into ended up being surprisingly beneficial.

I don't make these points because it is fun to point out how silly we are to think our lives will strictly follow our plans. (That is fun, though.)

I make those points to ask groups why would we think the flowchart ahead of us is any more predictable than the one behind us.

It will almost assuredly hold as many surprises. And that's okay.

Surprises along our career paths are inevitable. I do not believe, however, that the surprises, challenges, and opportunities we face are entirely random.

That thought was in my head recently while traveling and grabbing a quick dinner with a few folks. The guy taking orders behind the busy counter was openly dismissive and/or hostile to customers.

At first, I thought it was an act. I figured he was snapping at customers, but then giving them a smile or wink to let them in on the joke.

Yeah, turns out...not so much.

My 20 seconds or so of interacting with him while trying to order a hamburger was entirely unpleasant.

I'm thinking the smirk I couldn't keep off my face while trying to figure out if his rudeness was part of some routine that the locals found charming only made him more crotchety.

I began paying attention to the folks in line.

They tried not to look at him when ordering. None smiled.

They seemed tense until they were clear of him. I saw people go from relaxed in line, to tense while ordering, to seemingly relieved to be done.

The coworkers next to him seemed to be no more enjoying that environment than the people sheepishly trying to order their food.

That one dude, (who was unfortunately integral to the process) seemed to suck the joy out of the room.

Actions cause actions.

People who find themselves stuck in toxic environments (sometimes of their own making), or generating poor results and, yet, will not change anything experience few surprises.

Even in a pretty random world, their fate is rather predictable.

Some things are going to go as you planned this year. Some will not.

As hard as it is may be to believe sometimes, either result can be beneficial if you take the right lessons from them and keep going.

Whether that fellow was having a bad day, week, or life, I cannot say.

What I can say is that there is little chance his workdays will improve much unless his outward demeanor does.

Hint: Even forced smiles tend to generate sincere ones from others. That feedback tends to make your environment more human...and tends to... wait for it...generate actual smiles from you.

There are things in our environments we can't control. Our attitudes aren't one of them.

Make yours one you hope to see in others. You likely will.

"The only thing you can control in life is your reaction to it."

»Joe Verb

Dave Martin, author of The In-Store Advantage, has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.

For more info about having Dave or an FSI Consultant speak to your group, email Tina Coleman, tcoleman@SupermarketBank.com or call 800-992-4978.